NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

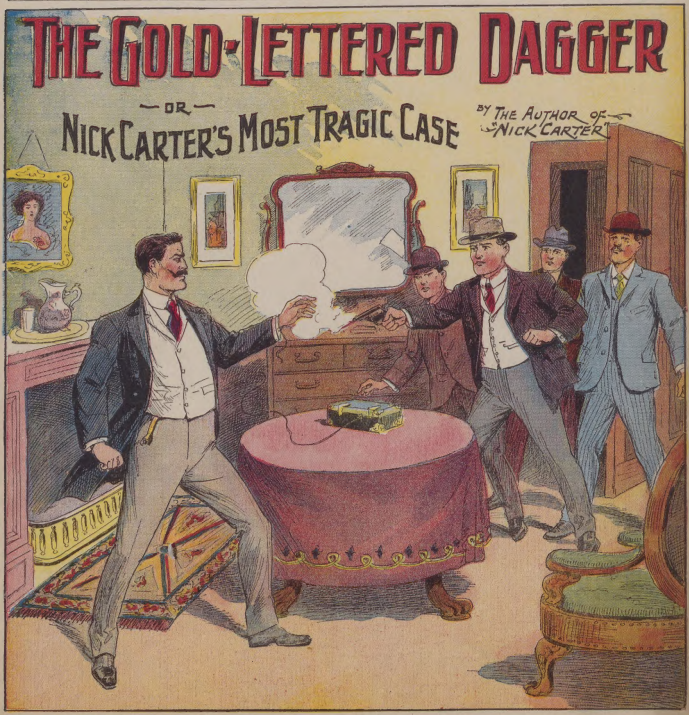
Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.

No. 491 NEW YORK, MAY 26, 1906. Price, Five Cents

THE GOLD-LETTERED DAGGER

—OR— NICK CARTER'S MOST TRAGIC CASE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



A revolver appeared in Nick Carter's hand as if by magic, and the bullet, true to its aim, severed the string close to Suvarnieff's wrist.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1906, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 491. NEW YORK, May 26, 1906. Price Five Cents.

Red Feb. 14/12
Cat. July 26, 1919.

THE GOLD-LETTERED DAGGER;

OR,

Nick Carter's Most Tragic Case.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS PRINCESS.

Nick Carter was engaged in examining his morning mail, when he came upon the following letter:

"DEAR MR. CARTER: You will pardon this familiar mode of address, I hope, and also a somewhat incoherent letter, for I have time to write but little, and may be interrupted at any moment. If interruption does occur, and I am compelled to stop writing without completing what I have to say, I beg that you will do the best you can in my behalf, with the meager information you will have at your command.

"To begin, I wish to tell you that I am the unwilling participant in a constant succession of felonies; I am made the catspaw of an organization of criminals concerning whom I know very little, save that their principal occupation is smuggling diamonds into the United States; an organization which consists of at least five persons, whom I shall name, and which employs unnumbered agents, on this side of the water, and in Europe.

"These men stop at nothing to attain their ends; already, to my certain knowledge, they are guilty of at least one murder, and, I suspect, two others.

"I am, by birth, a Russian princess, banished from my own country for sympathizing with the revolution which followed the Japanese War. My half-brother—formerly a colonel in the Russian Army—was banished at the same time. I placed myself under his protection, and discovered all too late that he is a scoundrel, a thief, and perhaps a murderer; and that his pretended solicitude in my behalf has been extended to me merely that he might make use of my beauty—men say that I am very beautiful; I mention this without egotism—to carry out his infamous designs.

"I have been, perhaps, a too willing victim of their plots; I have fallen in with their machinations because there seemed to be nothing else for me to do; I might even have continued on in this way until I became as bad as they are were it not for the fact that now they have concocted a plot which is almost too infamous for me to mention.

"In a few words, it is this:

"I am to appear suddenly in——"

The letter ended abruptly just here. A large blot of

ink had fallen to the page just beneath the writing, and was smeared across it, as if the writer had hastily attempted to wipe it away.

Just below the writing, two letters had been hastily formed—they were "Ol"—and almost touching them there was a second blot, like the first, although not so large.

The paper on which the letter was written was evidently a sheet torn from an ordinary pad; it had been crushed together in the hand before it was folded, as if the writer, at the instant of interruption, had started to her feet, and endeavored to conceal the fact that she had been engaged in writing.

The handwriting itself was beautiful, essentially feminine, and almost as perfect as copperplate, although there was a foreign touch to it.

The envelope was of the stamped variety, supplied and sold by the government, and the address upon it was merely "Mr. Nicholas Carter, New York City."

This also had been crushed in the hand; moreover, it was quite soiled on the back, as if it had been dropped in the street, and had remained where it had fallen for a considerable time.

Indeed, there was a smudge across the face of the envelope, which indicated that at least one foot had trodden upon it before it was recovered, and this smudge was of a faintly red hue, suggesting that the boot that had caused it had, somewhere, not long before, been in contact with brick-dust.

In one corner—the farthest one from the stamp—there was a mark on either side of the envelope, showing where a thumb and finger had touched it, and the detective, with his glass, quickly discovered that the thumb and finger aforesaid had been soiled with plaster or mortar at the time the letter was found.

The envelope was postmarked in Brooklyn, at seven-thirty o'clock the preceding evening.

The detective put the letter aside, and leaned back in his chair; and Chick, who was seated opposite him at the table, inquired:

"Have you found something interesting, Nick?"

"I have received a most aggravating letter," replied the detective, and he tossed it across the breakfast-table to his chief assistant.

Chick read it through to the end twice, and then, with a smile, he remarked:

"She might have told you the whole story in the time that it required to explain why she intended writing it at all."

"That is true enough. It is the woman of it, I suppose. Have you heard anything about any diamond smuggling lately, Chick?"

"Not a word."

"When you have finished your breakfast, I wish you would call up Chief Wilkie's office, in Washington, and ask about it."

"All right."

"If the Russian princess had dated her confounded letter——"

"It was postmarked last night."

"Oh, I know that well enough; but that is no evidence in this case that the letter itself was written yesterday—or a week ago, even."

"Why not?"

"Because it is quite evident that it was picked up somewhere in the street by a brick-mason, or a hod-carrier, who stepped on it before he saw it, and who then thrust it into his pocket and carried it home with him."

Chick nodded.

"The man who found it lives in Brooklyn, and he may have picked up the letter anywhere in Greater New York."

"Sure, and he may also have carried it in his pocket several days, or a week, before it occurred to him to post it."

"Or a month."

"Do you think it is worth bothering about at all, Nick?"

"Probably not; and yet it interests me."

"Why?"

"Doubtless, because of its aggravating qualities. I never did like an unfinished story."

Chick took the letter in his hand again.

"She started to sign her name, even after the interruption came," he said.

"Yes; her given name is, evidently, Olga."

"If we could find that hod-carrier——" suggested Chick tentatively.

"You seem to be getting interested in the letter yourself, Chick."

"Well, why not? We've nothing important on hand at the moment. I like abstruse problems such as this one."

He raised the letter, and touched it against his nose.

"Smell anything?" asked Nick, smiling.

"Yes. Rather an odd perfume, that. Did you notice it?"

"Yes. At once. It was quite pronounced when I broke the seal. It has become partly dissipated since then."

"What would you call it? Do you know what it is?"

"Quite well. It is called 'Fabyan,' and is rare and very expensive. It is quite a favorite among the nobles of Russia."

"Then we might regard it as mute evidence of the truth of the letter—so far as the letter goes; eh?"

"Yes; I think so."

"I've a good mind to make an effort to find that hod-carrier, Nick."

"You may, if you care to do so—after you have telephoned Washington."

"Oh, I will attend to that right away."

The detective busied himself with his breakfast for a few moments, and then attacked the remainder of his mail.

There were several letters still unopened, but he went through them rapidly, until he came to the last one; and, after reading it, he glanced across the table toward Chick, and remarked:

"You may not have an opportunity to attend to your hod-carrier, after all."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Read that;" and the detective tossed a second letter across the table.

"If Mr. Nicholas Carter is disengaged," it read, "and will call upon Captain Alexis de Plantois, at his apartments in the Hotel Percheron, at half-past nine o'clock of the evening of the fifteenth instant, he will confer a favor upon that gentleman, and, incidentally, may perform certain services to his own great advantage."

"That is certainly brief, and very much to the point," said Chick, as he refolded the note and returned it. "The appointment is for this evening, too."

"Yes."

"Who is Captain Alexis de Plantois?"

"My dear Chick, I haven't the least idea."

"He might turn out to be the half-brother of the girl who wrote the other letter?"

"Nonsense, Chick!"

"I was joking, of course. Shall you make the call?"

"I think so."

"Want me?"

"No."

"Then I'll improve the day by looking up the hod-carrier."

"You might about as well look for a needle in a haystack."

"Granted; but, as I said before, I like these abstruse problems."

"Do you really mean, Chick, that the half-finished letter interests you so much that you would care seriously to look into it?"

"I certainly do. I think I would like nothing better at the present moment than to do that very thing. I don't know whether it is the perfume, or the handwriting, or the manner of expression in the letter, or the pathetic element connected with it that interests me; but I am undeniably interested. I would like to look into the matter seriously."

"Then you shall do so."

"Eh?"

"I'll detail you on the case," said Nick, laughing. "It is really no case at all, of course; but if you choose to make one of it—go ahead. I'm willing. I'll give you seven days to find the hod-carrier—and the girl."

"The princess?"

"Precisely."

"Bet you a hat that I find them both, and have the whole story pat before the end of seven days."

"Done."

Chick placed the half-finished letter in his pocket, rose from the table, and went to the telephone.

CHAPTER II.

A COMPLICATED CASE.

Twenty minutes later, when the two detectives met in the study, Nick asked of his assistant:

"Anything interesting from Wilkie's office?"

"Nothing doing," replied Chick laconically.

"The government secret service hasn't heard of this wholesale smuggling affair, eh?"

"They tell me that they are not aware of anything unusual in that line at the present moment. Of course, there is always more or less of it going on. It never quite stops; but they have no information to indicate that there is any organized gang at work in that line just now."

"Humph!" said Nick, and he crossed the room to his desk.

Presently he looked up, and remarked:

"I think I'll take a Dunlap, Chick."

"You will take it when you have won it, and not before."

"Oh! I supposed that now you would give up the idea of looking for the hod-carrier—and the princess."

"Not at all. I am even more determined than ever."

"But she was evidently mistaken about a part of her letter—if not all of it. If there were any extensive smuggling of diamonds going on, depend upon it, Wilkie would know it, even if he had no idea who was doing it. I strongly suspect that the letter is a hoax, Chick."

"All right. It may be so. I'll admit that. All the same, it impresses me as being real. I think the writer of that letter was in deadly earnest."

"Well, how did the letter get on the sidewalk, where a hod-carrier could step on it? Do you think that the writer is a prisoner somewhere, and that she threw it out of a window for the first passer-by to find and post for her?"

"That might be the fact—but I don't think so."

"No? What is your idea?"

"I haven't any idea on the subject as yet; I am only guessing."

"Well, what do you guess? Tell me that. Sometimes a guess is better than prima facie evidence."

"Very well, then; I guess that Princess Olga——"

"So! You have grown familiar with her already, have you?" laughed Nick.

"I guess that Princess Olga," repeated Chick, without a change of expression, "is not detained as a prisoner anywhere, but that her every move is narrowly watched; that for some reason she lives in terror of her life—or of a worse fate—to her—than death; that when she was interrupted in the writing of that letter she crushed it in her hand, and thrust it into her pocket, or concealed it among the folds of her gown; that she had already prepared the envelope; women always address the envelope before they write the letter, and in this particular case that was a fortunate circumstance; that she had already prepared the envelope; that later she found an opportunity to place the letter inside it, and that still later, while walking on the street, the opportunity came for her to dispose of it, unobserved, by dropping it behind her."

"I declare, Chick, you have built up quite a romance about it, haven't you?"

"I think that I will find that there is quite a romance connected with it."

"Perhaps. Who knows! I suppose you will look for your hod-carrier first; eh?"

"Yes."

"How do you expect to find him?"

"I am going to apply first at the headquarters of the Bricklayers' Union," replied Chick quietly.

"By Jove! Chick, that is not a bad idea at all. You can get a list of their members who live in Brooklyn, you can select those who live in the neighborhood of the station where the letter was postmarked, and——"

"I can do better than that. But I won't bother you with my ideas just now. I've got seven days, and I mean to have a good time out of it, if nothing else."

"All right. Go ahead; and good luck to you!"

At the headquarters of the Bricklayers' Union, somewhat later in the day, Chick found a very intelligent and a very obliging man in charge. To him he stated the case as follows:

"Somewhere in this city—probably in Brooklyn—there lives a man who is a bricklayer, or a mason's helper, I think, who has recently found a letter on the street, which he picked up and mailed. I wish to find the man who did that, if it is possible to do so; and when he is found I will give him ten dollars for such information as he may possess concerning the subject. Do you think you can help me to find him?"

"I think so. How do you know that the letter was found and posted by a bricklayer, or by a mason's helper?"

Chick took the letter from his pocket, withdrew it from the envelope, and passed the latter across the table to his companion. With it, he offered his magnifying-glass.

"If you will examine the envelope," he said, "you will find the answer to your question there. You will observe that the man stepped on the letter before he picked it up, and that there are decided evidences of brick-dust upon it."

"Still, we do not know that the man who picked it from the street and posted it is the same man who stepped on it. That man might have been far in advance of the one who found it."

"Possibly that is true; but if you will examine what I might designate as the southwest corner of the envelope, you will discover the marks of a thumb and finger, one on either side."

"Yes."

"Now, if you will use the glass, you will discover, also, that the thumb and finger were soiled with mortar, or plaster, when the envelope was recovered. It is quite plainly the fact when viewed through the glass."

"You are right. It is."

"Hence my conclusion. Now, can you assist me to find that man?"

"Yes. Are you engaged this evening?"

"Not at all."

"There is to be a meeting of Division G of the union, to-night. I think it would be well if you were to go there, and state your case to them."

"Would I be admitted?"

"I will accompany you, and arrange for that."

"Thank you. That is very kind. In what part of the city does this Division G happen to hold its meeting?"

"At a hall on Reid Avenue, near Broadway; the old Eastern District of Brooklyn. It is rather far out, but——"

"But, very fortunately, it happens to be in the immediate locality where this letter was posted."

"All the better. If you will come here at seven o'clock, I will take you to the meeting, and will arrange that you shall be heard."

And thus it happened that when the meeting of the union was called to order, the chairman announced that there was a stranger waiting outside, who wished to say something to the assembly before they proceeded to business; and thereupon Chick was admitted.

He was conducted to the platform, and, without preamble, he addressed them at once.

"My friends," he said, "I am a stranger among you, and I have come to ask a favor. Two favors, in fact, for the first one is that each of you will hold what I have to say in confidence. I do not wish, at the present moment, that either the police or the newspapers should know about it.

"That being understood, the other favor I ask is for certain information which one of you, or one of your

friends, possesses. You have all doubtless heard of Nick Carter, the detective?"

There was a general murmur of assent throughout the room.

"I am his chief assistant," continued Chick. "This morning we received a letter, written by a woman, who is in great distress and trouble. For some reason unknown to us, she had not time to complete her letter, so we do not know who the writer is, or where she may be found. But the letter was sealed and addressed, nevertheless. Here it is.

"Now, the manner in which you can help me is this: The letter was lost, or was purposely dropped on the street, where, later, it was found by a man who subsequently posted it. I believe that man to have been a bricklayer, or a mason's helper. Before he noticed it at all, he stepped upon it. Then he picked it up between his thumb and finger, and subsequently—I do not know how long a time after that—the letter was posted in this neighborhood. I am very anxious to know if——"

He was interrupted by a man, who leaped to his feet at the rear of the hall.

"Wait a mintie, sor!" he shouted. "Faith, it's the divil ye are for knowin' things. 'Twas I that found the letter, sor; but, sure, I haven't seen the shape of it since that toime."

He stood silent for a moment, and then he continued:

"Divil a bit of it would I have remembered at all, at all, if the gintlemon hadn't described exactly how the thing happened. He might have been lookin' on at me whin I picked it up, and he couldn't have towld of it better.

"'Twas this way: I was workin' for Moriarty on a buildin' he was puttin' up in Forty-seventh Street, east of Broadway, and whin I left that night I started for the subway on me way to me home. Whin I got almost to Broadway I noticed that a gintlemon and a lady were a-walkin' just in front of me.

"I don't know why I noticed 'em, but I did; and purty soon the lady put her hand behind her back and deliberately dropped something white to the ground. I somehow knew that she done it a-purpose, and I was that close to thim that almost the minute the letter touched the pavement I had me fut on it; and, sure, me fut was big enough to cover it entirely, so it was.

"The gintlemon wheeled around, a minute after, an' came a-tearin' back, lookin' as he wint, and thin he says to say, says he: 'Have ye found onything, me mon?' 'I have not,' says I; and sure I was on one knee at the time, busy in tyin' the string of me shoe—the shoe that covered the letter the lady dropped.

"'Did ye see the lady drop something?' says he. 'I did not,' says I. 'It is too bad,' says he, 'because ye might have earned a dollar aisy if ye had,' says he. 'I worrk f'r me dollars,' says I; 'bad cess to ye!' and, with that, he turned on his heel and wint away.

"I put the letter in me pocket, widout lookin' at it, only noticin' that there was a stamp on it, and intindin' to mail it for the lady, f'r that is what I thought she wanted me to do; but, by the powers, I forgot all about it from that minute; and, faith, I haven't so much as thought of it from that day to this.

"I remimber that the ould jumper I wore that day was ragged, and in the mornin' I put on another wan. Mebby that's wan reason why I forgot the letter. Sure, sor, I haven't thought of it since that time, and I don't know how the letter got to you at last, unless the old woman found it in me blouse, and put it in the box.

"That is the whole story, sor; and, if it's any good to ye, I'm glad of it."

"Do you think you can recall just when it was that you found the letter?" asked Chick.

"Yis, sor. I left that job over there to go onto me prisint worrk. It is four weeks come Monday since I came to me prisint job, and it was the Friday night week before that whin I found the letter. That would make it just five weeks ago to-night, sor. Faith, it's a long toime, ain't it? I'm mighty sorry, sor, that I didn't attind to it at wance, sor, so I am."

"You were not at fault in forgetting it, under the circumstances."

"Thank ye, sor."

"Will you step outside with me, and talk the matter over a little further?" asked Chick.

"Sure, I will do that same, sor, if ye'll wait till afther the meetin'. It's a business meetin' to-night, and I want to be prisint; but if ye'll wait——"

"I will wait."

Chick turned to the chairman then, and added:

"If you will permit me, I would like to donate fifty dollars to the treasury of your organization. You have shown me great kindness, and I am very grateful. I thank you for accepting it."

Then, as he was descending from the platform, he stopped again, and, addressing the man who had found the letter, he asked:

"Will you tell me your name, please?"

"It's Mike, sor—Mike Finnigan."

"Thank you. I will wait for you in the saloon on the corner, and I will ask all your friends to have a glass of beer or a cigar with me when the meeting is over."

As Chick stepped from the platform, amid the murmur of approval that followed his suggestion, there was a rap at the door, and a young man stepped inside.

"If there is a man here by the name of Chiokering Carter, he's wanted at the telephone in the drug-store," he announced; and went out.

"I will wait for you, Finnigan," said Chick, as he fol-

lowed the clerk from the room; "but don't be longer than necessary."

He had told Nick of the meeting he was to attend, and where it was to be held, and he had no doubt that his chief wanted him, since he was the only one who could know where he was.

"Hello!" he called, lifting the receiver to his ear.

"Hello! That you, Chick?"

"Yes."

"Have you found out anything?"

"Yes; considerable. I will know still more before I leave here, I think."

"I called you up to tell you that there is more of this affair than we supposed."

"Yes?"

"I kept the appointment at the Hotel Percheron, at half-past nine, but I found that Captain Alexis de Plantois was unable to receive me; he was dead when I arrived."

"Dead!"

"Yes; and murdered, at that; not half an hour before I got there; stabbed in the back, between the shoulders, as he sat at his desk in his room, and the dagger left in the wound. Directly in front of him on the desk—he must have been looking at it when he was struck—was a card with some writing upon it."

"Well?"

"I wished to tell you at once that the handwriting on the card was the same as that of the unfinished letter I received this morning, and that it was signed 'Olga.'"

"So there is some connection between the two cases, after all?"

"It would seem so. I wished you to know it at once. I thought the knowledge might have some effect upon the character of the investigation you are making."

"It will make me all the more eager; that is all. Tell me about—— What?"

"I don't want to say anything more about the murder over the phone. I will only say that it is a mysterious affair altogether, and will be an interesting case. For the rest, you must wait until you see me. I will be at the house when you get home."

CHAPTER III.

AN IRISHMAN'S LOVE OF BEAUTY.

"What a strange coincidence!" thought Chick, as he turned away from the telephone and crossed the street to the place where he had agreed to await the coming of Mike Finnigan. "The letter from the unknown Princess Olga is delayed five weeks, and finally reaches us in the same mail with another letter which, without doubt, referred to the same subject.

"The man who sent the second letter has paid for his temerity with his life, and it may be that the writer of the first one—Olga—is also dead by this time."

He had not long to wait before Finnigan appeared, and Chick, having left sufficient money with the proprietor of the place to pay for the treat he had proposed, led the Irishman away.

"We will go to another, and a more quiet place, Mike," he said. "I may want to talk with you for some time."

"All right, sor. Just as you say."

A few blocks farther down they found a place where there was an unoccupied back room, and here they seated themselves at a table.

"Now, Mike," said Chick, "I don't suppose you saw that woman's face, did you?"

"The wan who dropped the letter, sor?"

"Why, certainly. There weren't two women, were there?"

"Yis, sor. Leastwise, it turned out that way."

"How was that?"

"Whin I first saw thim, the gintlemon and the lady were walkin' together in the way I have towld ye; but in front av thim was walkin' another woman, that I didn't notice at the first sight av thim. But to answer yer question, sor, I did see her face."

"Then you can describe her to me?"

"Sure, I dunno about that. If I had the gift av Charles Lever, 'r av wan av thim writin' fellers, mebby I could do it; but faith, sor, it would take more eloquence than I have wid me to so much as give ye an idea how beautiful she was."

"Was she young?"

"A slip av a girrul, no less; an' wid eyes like stars, an' lips like roses, and teeth like pearls, an' a mouth that would have made that girrul Psyche hunt cover, so it would."

"You are quite a poet, Mike."

"No; I'm a mon; an' bad cess to a mon who can't see beauty in a woman whin she stands forninst him and looks inty his two eyes as that girrul looked inty mine.

"Faith, sor, ye see, she knew that I had the letter, and that I'd lied about it to the gintlemon who was wid her; an' whin she got a chanct, she thanked me wid her sp'akin' eyes f'r all the world as if she had said the worrds."

"You have only told me that she was beautiful and young; you have not described her to me at all."

"Divil a bit better can I do it, sor, than to tell ye that she looked like an angel that had stepped down out av paradise f'r a minit. She wasn't tall, 'r short; fat, 'r lane; but she was sorter betwixt an' betwane thim all; an' she carried her head like a two-year-old; an' she walked as if the grround was put there f'r her own convenience, so she did. Ye should have seen the air av her! By the powers, it's a quane she is, an' no mistake!"

"What color was her hair?"

"It was nathur black n'r brown, but sort av batwane the two, wid a little bit av a Galway sunset a-shinin' through it somewhere; and her two eyes were the same, wid the same sunshine in 'em; an' her nose was straight; an' her brows were straight, an' even, an' black; an' her lashes were thot long, sure, that a birrud might have lighted on thim, almost."

"Come, come, Mike! That won't do."

"Well, sor, mebby that's a figger av spache, but ye'll be afther knowin' what I mane by it. And the two feet av her—begorra, they weren't bigger than a baby's!"

"How was she dressed?"

"In black, sor. I don't mane in mourning, but that her dress was black, save f'r a bit av red that was around her throat. Faith, I've dr'amed about her many a toime since that day, and it's a-botherin' me now to know how the divil I came to forgit that letter. Bad cess to me if harrm comes to her from it!"

"Is that all that you can tell me about her?"

"It is that, sor. If I was an artist, sure, I could draw her pictur' f'r ye; but I haven't the power, sor, more's the pity."

"Now, what about the other woman? But, first, how did it happen that you did not at once know that there were two women in the party?"

"The other wan was walkin' ahead, sor. It wasn't till after I'd picked up the letter an' moved on a bit, detarmined to see the face of her as dropped it, that I discovered that there were two av thim wid th' mon.

"Divil a bit av me knows much about that same. I had only eyes f'r the other wan. But she was owlder, and bigger. She was handsome, too, but not like the other wan. She looked at me wance, and, sure, I thought there was a torchlight procession in her eyes whin she done it!"

"Was she light, or dark?"

"Darrk. Her hair and eyes were as black as coal; and that's all I know about her, save that I thought she wore too many diamonds f'r the strate."

"And now the man; eh?"

"Bad luck to him, says I!"

"Describe him."

"He was a big brute of a chap, wid a pair av eyes in his head that would freeze ye if ye looked inty 'em long enough; and a pair av jaws on him which looked as if he could bite through a stone. He wore a mustache that was waxed at he ends, and he walked like a soldier. I think mebby he might have been past thirty years old."

"How old was the girl, do you think?"

"Mebbe twenty."

"And the woman?"

"Mebbe thirty."

"What color were the man's hair and eyes?"

"His hair was black—what I could see av it. His eyes were light in color—mebby they was blue, 'r gray. And they was ugly eyes. They made me shudder."

"He was tall, you say?"

"Yis, sor; as tall as I am, and I'm six feet, sir."

"Tell me what you did after you had picked up the letter, and after the man had spoken to you."

"Sure, sor, as I towld ye, I knew at wance that the girrul had dropped the letter a-purpose, and I thought mebby, if I got in front av her, she would give me some sign what I was to do wid it, so I walked fast, and wint past 'em; and thin, whin I had got a little way ahead, sure, I dropped me dinner-pail on the pavement, so that I had to turn around directly in front av thim all to pick it up. It was thin that I saw the girrul, and the rist av thim. That's how; and, by the same token, that's all I know about it, or thim, at all, at all."

"They turned into Broadway?"

"Yis; goin' up-town; and that's the last I saw av thim."

"And you have never seen any of them since that time?"

"No, sor."

"If you should happen to see any one of them again, would you recognize that particular one, no matter which one of the three it might happen to be?"

"I would, sor."

"You are sure of that?"

"I am, sor."

"By the way, there is one question that I forgot to ask you."

"Yis, sor."

"Did you notice any resemblance between the two ladies? I mean, such a resemblance as one often notices among members of the same family?"

"Now that ye spake av it, I did, sor. I should say that mebby the two av thim were sisters, and that in the makin' av thim nature resarved all the beauty f'r the little wan, and gave all the divilment to the other. But they did look alike, now that ye spake av it."

"Are you going to work in the morning, Mike?"

"No, sor; we're laid off. That's what the mating was about to-night."

"Then I will take your address. If I should happen to want your services, you will come to me, won't you?"

"I will that, sor, if it is in the interests av the young lady."

"It is, certainly."

"I'll come. Ye can depend on that."

"Here is some money——"

"No, sor. Sure, ye don't know Mike Finnigan whin ye say that. If I was in nade av it, mebby I'd take it; but I'm not, praise be to God! And I want no money f'r sarvin' that slip av a cherrub. Besides, sor, ye've done a lot f'r the byes this night; and, if ever it should

happen that ye're wantin' f'r a friend, come over to Division G and look for wan. Ye'll find a lot av 'em, so ye will."

"You're a good fellow, Mike. How old are you?"

"Twinty-three, sor."

"Married?"

"Yis, sor; and wid two childers."

"It isn't at all likely, Mike, that you will ever see any one of those three people again; but, if such a thing should happen at any time, I want you to promise me right now that you will drop work at that instant and come straight to me and tell me. Here's my address."

"I'll do that same, sor."

"Then I will say good night to you now."

"Good night, sor, and good luck to ye."

"Thank you. If it should happen that I want you to-morrow, I will send for you."

"All right, sor. I'll be afther hangin' around the house the most av the day; and, if ye sind me a telegram, sure, I'll git it."

Chick lost no time now in returning to New York, but when he arrived at the home of the detective, Nick had not yet put in an appearance.

It was after midnight then, and but for that fact Chick would have gone at once to the Hotel Percheron, where the tragedy had occurred.

He was fully convinced in his own mind that the murder at the hotel was in some way connected with the mysterious Princess Olga, although he was obliged to confess to himself that there was really very little to base such a theory upon.

Nick Carter's recognition of the handwriting was one thread, of course; and the name "Olga" signed to the card that Nick had mentioned over the telephone another clue.

Chick realized, as he thought about it, that he was consumed by an overmastering curiosity to know what that card contained; and he was wishing with all his heart that Nick would come when the telephone bell rang out sharply.

It was Nick at the other end of the wire.

"I'm still at the Percheron, Chick," he said, over the phone. "I think that it would be well if you would come up here, and take a look at things before I leave the place. That is why I have waited."

"All right," replied Chick. "I'll be there in a jiffy."

And thirty minutes later he entered the hotel, where one of the clerks, who had been looking for him, conducted him at once to the scene of the tragedy.

Entering there, he found Nick and two policemen; and the detective, with a nod of greeting, pointed toward a second door, and said:

"Go in there, Chick, and look around you."

And Chick passed through the door, closing it after him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LETTERS IN THE DAGGER.

It was evident that the coroner had been there, and had given his consent to move the body, for it had been taken from the chair at the desk, where Nick described it as having been discovered, and was now laid out across the top of a plain table that had been brought into the room for that purpose.

Before Chick so much as glanced at the body, he crossed the room hurriedly to the desk, to discover if the card containing the writing was still there; but it was not, and Chick knew that it must, therefore, be reposing in the pocket of his chief.

Returning to the table, Chick stood beside the body of the dead man, and looked down upon it.

Instantly he started; then he smiled, and shrugged his shoulders; then he bent forward rather eagerly, and studied the dead face with considerable care.

Somebody had closed the eyes of the dead man, but Chick raised one of the lids, and looked at the iris beneath it.

It was cold, and light-blue—and glazed now with death, of course. Chick covered it again from view, and continued with his examination.

The hair was black; his mustache was waxed at the ends; the mouth was firm, determined, and almost cruel.

Chick parted the lips just a little—enough to see that the teeth were strong, and white, and even.

The man, in life, had been tall. Stretched upon the table, he looked very large and powerful. There was something of the soldier in his appearance, too, even though he was laid out at full length, and was dead.

"It is odd—very odd," mused Chick. "Mike's description fits this body to a tee; and yet, somehow, I cannot believe it is the same man. But, all the same, I must have Mike Finnigan over here in the morning, to see it."

He lifted one of the hands, and looked at it carefully, discovering that it was white, and well cared for, and that it was not a hand accustomed to doing work of any kind.

The clothing was rich, and of the latest fashion; the surroundings in the room were on a scale of elegance that amounted almost to extravagance. The corpse had been an unusually handsome man.

Beside it on the table lay the dagger with which he had been stabbed, and Chick took it in his hand.

He could not remember that he had ever seen one exactly like it before; not that it was so different from an ordinary dagger, with two edges, save that it was richly jeweled about the hilt, and that a fiery-red carbuncle blazed in the end of it.

It was the guard which divided the blade from the hilt that attracted his attention, and which he now examined with great care, for it had been fashioned out of

gold wire, and was nearly as wide as it was long, so that, in effect, it was almost round.

But that was not what attracted Chick. It was the manner in which the wire of gold had been manipulated by the hand of the artist who put it there. He held it nearer to the light, in order to see it more clearly.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed half aloud, after a few moments of study.

The gold wire of the hand-guard had been twisted and turned by the hand of an expert, so that hidden in its meshes there was a name. It was not discernible at first; in fact, the average beholder would not have noticed that it was there at all, for other wires had been so interwoven with the letters as almost to hide them from view.

But letters there were, and they spelled a name; and Chick spelled them out, letter by letter, jotting them down on his cuff with a pencil as he did so, until he was satisfied that he had found them all.

But what name did they spell? He could not discover that as yet, even though he knew that he had picked out every one of them from among the golden meshes.

In the order in which he jotted them down on his cuff, they were:

O—g—S—r—a—i—ff—M—s—o.

These were arranged along the inside of the rim of the guard, and formed what might be called the first line. Directly beneath them, but with each letter midway in distance between two of the letters of the first line, were:

I—a—u—v—n—c——o—c—w.

With a last look at the beautiful weapon, he returned it to its place on the table beside the body; and then, feeling satisfied that he had seen all that the detective wished him to note, he turned away, and rejoined the others in the outer room.

"All through?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Then we might as well be going."

"Yes."

"The body will be taken to Merritt's as soon as they come after it. We can see it there, in the morning, if we care to do so."

"There is an Irishman over in Brooklyn whom I would like to have here to look at it in the morning."

Nick nodded.

"Have you been here ever since you telephoned to me?" asked Chick, as they bade the officers good night and went out of the room.

"No; I only returned a little while ago. I had the room all to myself for almost an hour when the murder was first discovered."

"Who discovered it?"

"I did; that is, one of the clerks and I made the discovery together. He happened to be about to go to that floor himself, when I called and gave him my card to send up, and he replied at once that I was expected, and that, as he was going that way, he would show me to the room himself."

"So you found the body, together, did you?"

"Yes. The clerk rapped at the door, and rang the electric bell; but we could get no response, and finally I suggested that, inasmuch as he was right there with me, I would open the door, if he gave his approval, and we would enter together, and see what was the matter.

"I thought the poor fellow would collapse when we found the body; and I persuaded him to stay there with me while I made an examination of the premises before we gave the alarm.

"When, at last, we did notify the police and the coroner, I had sifted the affair pretty thoroughly—that is, all there was to sift."

"There wasn't much, was there?"

"Not very much. A little."

"What did you send me into that room alone for?" asked Chick.

"To see what you would find."

"There is one thing that I did not find."

"You refer to the card, I suppose? The one I told you about over the telephone?"

"Yes."

"I have it in my pocket."

"So I supposed. Has any one else seen it?"

"Not yet."

"Did you examine the dagger, Nick?"

"Yes."

"Did you find any letters hidden in that wire-work?"

"Of course."

"Do you know what they spell?"

"Not yet. I'm leaving that until we get home. I have a copy of them."

"So have I."

"I thought you would take one. Did you make anything out of them at all?"

"Yes. One word—a name."

"Eh? Did you? That is farther along than I got; but, still, I was giving my attention to other things. I left the deciphering of the letters until I had more time. What was the name that you found there?"

"Olga."

"I thought so."

"And I think that the method of finding it will prove to be the key to what the remaining letters spell."

"Of course. At least, it should be so."

"Everything seems to point to Olga," said Chick.

"Quite the contrary. Everything seems to point anywhere save at Olga."

"I didn't mean that things point to her as the murderer."

"No? What did you mean?"

"I meant that everything points to her as being herself the keynote of this double-headed case that has come to us so strangely."

"Quite right, Chick. Here we are at home. Go to bed now. We will discuss this matter after breakfast in the morning."

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CRIME.

There was no discussion of the murder at the Hotel Percheron at the breakfast-table the following morning; both detectives sat silently through the meal, preferring to reserve their interchange of ideas until they could shut themselves in the detective's study.

Chick had already called a messenger boy and despatched a telegram to Mike Finnigan; for, while he did not believe that the dead man was the same person whom Finnigan had seen in the company of Princess Olga at the time of the dropping of the letter in the street, there was yet a sufficient likeness about him to the description that Finnigan had given to make it imperative that the Irishman should view the corpse.

"I wish that I might have brought that dagger away with me," said Chick, when they had finally repaired to the study. "I think it is the most curiously beautiful weapon I ever saw."

"It certainly is," agreed the detective. "And now, Chick, let us see what we can make of those letters."

The assistant drew a pad of paper toward him, and then, from the cuff worn yesterday, which he had brought to the study with him, he copied the letters in the order in which he had discovered them—as follows:

"O g S r a i f f M s o
l a u v n e o c w."

"There you have it!" he exclaimed, as soon as he had finished. "It is as plain as the nose on your face."

Nick Carter took the pad in his hand, and looked at it. Then he smiled.

"Olga Survanieff, Moscow," he read aloud. "That is evidently the name of our princess."

"Sure thing."

"It is a queer way to decorate a dagger."

"A very pretty way, I think. The weapon was, doubtless, presented to her by a goldsmith, who delighted in doing odd things. The question now seems to be, How did it get into Captain Alexis de Plantois' back?"

"Precisely."

"Do you suppose that she put it there?"

"Hardly. If she had, she would scarcely have left it there."

"She might not have had the courage to withdraw it after striking the blow."

"Are you arguing that Olga is the murderer, Chick?"

"No; but I am bringing up every point that I can think of against her."

"There are others of which you have not heard are more against her than that."

"I had supposed as much."

"Eh? You had? Why?"

"Because a person who would make use of her dagger and leave it in the wound for the purpose of casting suspicion upon her would also take other measures toward the same end."

"Right. But don't you think we are rather jumping at conclusions in presupposing the innocence of a woman we have never seen?"

"I have as good as seen her," said Chick quietly.

"Eh? How is that?"

"I have heard her described by a soft-hearted and impetuous Irishman. Finnigan might have been a second Tom Moore if he had had the advantages."

Chick then recounted all that had taken place at the meeting of the Bricklayers' Union in Brooklyn; and then, with some eagerness, he said:

"And now, Nick, please tell me about the murder."

"I have already told you how I found the body."

"Yes; and the card on the desk. What was that card, Nick?"

"Here it is. Look at it for yourself."

He passed it over to his assistant, and Chick read as follows:

"'I will accede to your request, if possible; and, if so, I will be at your rooms this evening at nine. I shall not remain with you more than ten minutes. OLGA.'"

There was silence between them for a moment; and then the detective remarked:

"That card very plainly suggests that Olga had an engagement with the captain just half an hour before my own engagement with him was due, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"And the handwriting on the card is very palpably the same as that of the letter—the unfinished letter we received; eh?"

"Yes; any one can see that with half an eye."

"And I am able to assure you that when I found the body the man had been dead less than half an hour."

"How do you know that?"

"He was down-stairs in the office of the hotel at exactly nine o'clock—just half an hour before I arrived there. He applied at the desk for his mail; the clerk who afterward accompanied me to his room waited upon him, and spoke with him. He knows that the time was exactly nine o'clock, because the captain looked at his watch in the clerk's presence, and remarked that it was nine o'clock, and that he was expecting a Mr. Carter to call at half-past nine. He also requested that I be sent directly to his rooms when I arrived."

"I see. That is plain enough."

"He left the hotel desk and went directly to the elevator, and supposedly to his rooms."

"Yes."

"At half-past nine I arrived there, went to his rooms, as you already know—and found him as I have described."

"Had anybody else called at the desk for him?"

"No."

"Was anybody seen to enter or leave his rooms?"

"No."

"Confound it, Nick! I wish you would tell me about it."

"I would rather you would get at it in the way you are doing. It is not only good practise for you, but it helps me."

"How does it help you, I would like to know?"

"Because questions always suggest something. However, I will tell you this: There is no doubt in my mind that the person who killed him was already waiting in the room for his return at the time he stood at the hotel desk talking with the clerk."

"That seems probable."

"The murderer was evidently waiting there, concealed. I am convinced, from the manner of the crime, that the murdered man had no idea that there was any person in his rooms at that moment. I think he entered, threw aside his light top-coat——"

"He had been out of the hotel, then?"

"Yes; threw aside his top-coat, and went at once to his desk. There he picked up a pen, drew a sheet of paper toward him, dipped his pen in the ink, and began to write. He had gotten as far as the superscription of his letter when the blow fell. That far, and no farther."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I have the sheet of paper here in my pocket. Here it is."

The detective passed it across the table to Chick, who saw written upon a letter-head of the hotel the date, and then the three words, "My dear Olga." After that there was a blot of the shape of a pen, showing that the pen had dropped suddenly from the fingers upon the paper.

"You will remember," continued the detective, "that the position of the desk is such that in sitting at it to write, the man's back was toward the door which connected the two rooms. He could not have accommodated himself better to the purposes of the murderer than to have seated himself there just as he did."

"That's so."

"It was an easy matter for the murderer to steal upon him silently from the other room. The victim was absorbed in his occupation. He had gotten that far in his letter, and his attention was centered upon what he intended to write."

"And so," said Chick musingly, "she was able to approach him without——"

"*She?* Have you arrived at the decision that it was Olga who did it?"

"No. I think it was the other woman."

"The other woman! Oh! You mean the other one whom Finnigan described as having been with her the day she dropped the letter in the street?"

"Yes."

"You are altogether too hasty, Chick."

"Perhaps so. It is only an impression, of course. I spoke hastily."

"Nevertheless, you may be right. The Irishman's description of the woman, as you have repeated it to me, was certainly indicative of her competence to perform such an act; and, if Olga's letter to me was true, the woman was doubtless one of the several who were in league against her."

"You say you had almost an hour in that room in which to look about you before you gave the alarm," said Chick. "Will you tell me what you found?"

"Yes. I found, for one thing, that it *was* a woman who had been there."

"You did?"

"Yes. She had concealed herself behind the sofa, in the larger of the two rooms. Did I say sofa? I meant a davenport."

"Yes; I remember it."

"You will also remember that it stands across one corner of the room, and so offers a very fair place for concealment."

"Yes."

"I don't think the davenport had been much used, nor do I think that the servants in that hotel are overcareful about dust. In this case, it is fortunate that they are not. The davenport, you will remember, is mahogany, upholstered in red plush."

"Yes."

"Considerable dust had collected on the top of the back of it. The woman had climbed over the davenport, in order to conceal herself behind it. I could see where she had grasped the back of it with her hands; I could see where her skirts had brushed away the dust from almost one-half of it. This, of itself, was sufficient proof that it was a woman, for a man would have placed his hands on the back and jumped over."

"Sure."

"But, in addition to that, there was a plain imprint in the dust of one of her hands—the left one."

"Plain enough for identification?"

"Oh, no; but plain enough to satisfy anybody that it was made by the hand of a woman."

"Anything more?"

"Yes; a very perceptible imprint of one of her feet

on the plush covering of the davenport. A wonderfully small foot it was, too."

"Is that all?"

"No. Do you recall that perfume you noticed about the letter that Olga wrote to us?"

"Yes; the Fabyan."

"Exactly. It was plainly in evidence on the carpet behind the davenport, where she had stretched herself at full length on the floor while she awaited the coming of her intended victim."

Chick nodded his head, and muttered:

"It begins to look as if the murderer might have been Olga, after all."

"It does in some ways; it does not look so at all in others," replied the detective; "but even that is not all."

"What more?"

"A young woman who answers very well the description the Irishman gave you of Olga was noticed seated in the hotel parlor from half-past seven o'clock until nine—or, possibly, a very few moments after nine. Then she disappeared very suddenly, and it happens that nobody saw her go, nobody knows exactly when she went, and nobody can be found who knows where she went."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN IN THE DOORWAY.

Chick sat silent for a long time after that, thinking over what the detective had said; but presently he remarked:

"There may be some 'out' about the description. Finnigan said there was a distinct family resemblance between the two women."

"But he also said that Olga was 'maybe twenty,' and that the other one was 'maybe thirty,' didn't he?"

"Yes."

"The description of the woman in the parlor—or, rather, the three descriptions, for I obtained the version of three different persons—all point to the fact that this particular individual could not have been more than twenty years old. She is described as being very beautiful, with a sad and winsome face. She remained all the while she was there staring out through the window at the electric lights in the street—or at nothing. She sat very still. She had not at all the manner or the appearance of one who was expecting anybody to meet her. She was not a guest of the hotel. She had never been seen there before. She was richly dressed—in short, Chick, in my opinion, *she was the Princess Olga.*"

"Well, you don't mean what your last words imply. Tell me what you *do* mean."

Nick smiled across the table at his assistant, and answered slowly:

"Nine persons out of ten who understood this case as we understand it at the present moment would tell you that the murder was committed by the young woman who waited in the parlor. They would proceed somewhat in the following manner: They would say that she was familiar with the habits of the man she intended to kill; that she went to the hotel parlor at half-past seven, and established herself at the window, in order that she might watch the street in front of the hotel entrance; that she watched it in order to inform herself of the moment her intended victim should pass out upon the street; that she waited there until she saw him returning; that then she hastened to his rooms, entered them with a duplicate key, concealed herself, and awaited her opportunity; that, having performed the act she went there to do, she left the hotel by another door than the main one, and disappeared."

Chick shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing.

"But that is not at all my idea," continued the detective.

"Nor mine."

"The woman who *did* commit that murder entirely overdid her part in the effort she made to cast suspicion upon another."

"Upon Olga?"

"Yes. She did too many things in the way of directing the finger of suspicion toward the princess."

"So I think."

"First, we have the card found on the desk in front of the murdered man. There is no date upon it."

"No."

"Second, we have the dagger, which is very evidently the property of Olga Survaniefi."

"Yes."

"If Olga had gone there deliberately to do that deed, and had made careful calculations upon it, and preparations for it, she certainly would not have selected a dagger bearing her full name upon her weapon. She might have used such a weapon in a moment of impulse, but never with calculation and premeditation."

"You are right there."

"And, even if she had done so, she certainly would not have left it in the wound, nor would she have gone away from the scene of the crime leaving that card upon the desk, and the beginning of the letter he had started to write."

"No, sir-ree!"

"Third, we have the presence of Olga—for it undoubtedly was Olga—in the hotel parlor."

"Yes."

"A calculating murderer would not have seated herself in the parlor in that manner, and have remained there, in full view of everybody, so long a time."

"Certainly not."

"*But*—and here you have the nucleus of the whole thing—the woman who plotted to cast suspicions upon Olga, and who so thoroughly overdid it, might have

taken the girl to the hotel with her, have left her in the parlor, where her beauty would be sure to attract attention, and have summoned her away easily after the deed was done."

"But that suggests complicity."

"On the contrary, it does not. It is doubtful if Olga is aware even now that the man is dead. The morning papers would have told her so—if she had been permitted to see them; or it may be that now the real murderer has told her about the crime, and has also enlarged upon the pains she has taken to cast suspicion upon the younger woman."

"But who *is* this man who was killed?" demanded Chick, starting to his feet impatiently.

"All that we know about that is that his name is supposed to have been Captain Alexis de Plantois."

"How long has he lived in that hotel?"

"A little more than a week."

"And he registered from—where?"

"Paris."

"Did he go directly to that hotel from the steamer that brought him over?"

"Evidently. That is the recollection of the clerks at the desk, and his baggage bears out the idea."

"How do you explain that card you found on the desk?"

"By supposing that it referred to another time, and probably to another person, as well."

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of that."

"It was not addressed to any person. There is no evidence that the dead man ever saw it at all. On the contrary, it seems plain to me that the woman who killed him placed it where I found it after she had stabbed him."

"There is no doubt, however, that he had begun that letter in good faith, is there?"

"No. I think that part of it is all right. My own idea is that he was preparing that letter, to send it after he had finished his interview with me. Probably he intended to show me what he wrote, and anticipated getting my advice on the subject before he mailed the letter."

"Sure thing. That accounts for that. He was making use of that last half-hour before you were due for that very purpose."

"That is my idea."

"I wish there was a way by which we might get some idea who the man was."

"There is. I have already attended to that."

"You have?"

"Yes; I cabled the chief of the secret service in Paris at once for any information he might have concerning Captain Alexis de Plantois. I am expecting the reply at any moment now. It should have been here already."

There was a tap at the door at that moment, and Joseph appeared.

"Mr. Mike Finnigan, sir, to see Mr. Chick," he said. "And here is a telegram for you, Mr. Carter. The boy is waiting."

"All right," said Nick. "Bring Finnigan right up here; and wait till I read this cable."

He broke the seal, and read:

"'Alexis de Plantois, son of Compte Emile de Plantois; mother was Sofia Survanieff, a Russian princess. Is twenty-eight years old. Captain in French Army. Inherited about a million francs. Excellent character. Nothing known here against him. Connected with present Survanieff family through his mother. There is a Paul Survanieff of bad reputation. He somewhat resembles Plantois. It is possible that he might have represented himself to be the captain."

"That seems all right," said Nick, raising his eyes.

"Yes," replied Chick. "Why not cable again, asking for information of Olga and her family, Nick?"

"A good idea. I will."

He reached out for a blank, and wrote:

"Thanks. Will you also cable information concerning Olga Survanieff and her family, if you have any?

"CARTER."

"Give the messenger that, Joseph, and pay for it," he said. "Then you may bring Mr. Finnigan here."

The Irishman came into the room a few moments later, and Chick barely recognized him. He was dressed in his Sunday clothes, shaved, and he stood before them, straight, and tall, and handsome.

"Good morning, sor," he said to Chick. "I came the minute I received your tiligram. And faith, I was ready for it, too, for I thought you'd be afther sindin' f'r me. And is this Mr. Nick Carter, sor? Sure, it's often I've heard of ye, but I niver thought I'd be afther bein' in y'r own house wid ye."

"Be seated, Finnigan," said Chick. "There was a murder over here in New York last night, and I want you to go with me presently, to see if you can identify the body, although we have just received a message from Europe which seems to establish that for us."

Finnigan had started forward, and he now stood with clenched hands and tightened lips, and with blazing eyes.

"Sure, sor," he gasped out, "it ain't that purty slip av a girrul that was killed, is it?"

"No, no, Mike. It is a man. I thought at first that it might be the man who was with her—the one you described to me, you know. That is why I sent for you."

Finnigan dropped into a chair, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Sure, sor," he said, "I thought for a minute it might be her; and, if it had been, by the rock o' Cashel! I'd have hunted that spalpeen to the inds av the worruld but what I'd have found him and wrung his neck! Divil a

wan av me knows what has got inty me about that girrul, and me a married man, wid two babies; but there was something so swate and gintle about that Madonna face av hers that—well, I'm glad the corpse is a man, onyhow; so I am!"

"Shall we go to Merrit's now, Nick?" asked Chick of his chief.

"You may. You take Finnigan there, and hear what he has to say. I'll wait here till you return; or, if I happen to go out anywhere, I'll leave word for you."

And so, a moment later, Chick and Finnigan were on the street, and on their way to the offices of the burial company.

Mike Finnigan stood for a long time over the body of the man who had been so cruelly slain; but at last he turned to Chick, and said:

"It's not him. At first glance I thought mebby it was; but now I know it ain't. The two av thim look alike—and they don't; there's a strong resimblance betwane thim—and there ain't a dommed bit—beggin' yer pardon, sor. This poor divil here was a good man in his day; he shows it in his dead face, so he does. That other was a scoundrel, if ever I saw wan, bad cess to him! Mebbe they were brothers, sor, but it's more likely that they were cousins, I'm thinkin'. I don't know this man, sor. I niver saw him before. How was he kilt?"

"He was stabbed in the back—by a woman."

"Mebby it was that woman I saw wid the other feller and the slip av a girrul."

"We think it was," admitted Chick.

"It's her that could do it, sor. Sure, I niver saw——"

The Irishman stopped suddenly in what he was saying. He had turned while talking, so that he stood facing the street entrance, and he could see it through the glass door which separated the room they were in from the larger one in the front of the building; and now, as he ceased speaking, he seized Chick's arm in a grip of iron, which made the young detective wince.

"Don't turn around, sor!" he said. "Sure, he might know ye!"

"Who?" asked Chick. "What is the matter with you?"

"The mon! *Him!* Sure, he's jist comin' t'rough the door. He's fixed himself up wid a goatee on his chin and a pair av spectacles on his nose; but, be hivins, I'd know him among tin thousand, so I would!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW ON THE TRAIL.

For a moment Chick thought with great rapidity. And the thoughts which flashed through his brain in that brief interval were something like this:

"Here is the opportunity I have been seeking. How fortunate it was that I sent for Finnigan. The man is the Paul Survanieff of the cablegram, of course. I wonder if, by any chance, he knows who I am? It is not probable, but it is quite possible, that he does. What is he here for? Is he an accomplice to this murder, or does he only suspect that it has been done? If that is so, he has come here to convince himself on the matter. What have we against him for which he could be arrested? Not a thing on earth. Will he recognize Finnigan? I think it very unlikely, since I hardly knew him myself when I saw him this morning. Will he suspect who I am, even if he does not know? That is possible. One thing is certain—I must not lose sight of him again. He will take me to Olga, and that is what I most desire at the present moment. More than that, even, he can take me to the murderess. But will he? The very fact that he is here at all would argue against that idea. At all events, I must be cautious."

All these thoughts occurred to Chick in an interval in which you might have counted three; and then, aloud, he said:

"Finnigan!"

"Yis, sor."

"Is he coming this way? I don't wish to turn around just yet."

"He has stopped outside in the big room. He's talkin' wid the boss."

"Do you think he will recognize you?"

"Divil a bit av me knows!"

"You don't look like the same man since you dressed up."

"All the same, that spalpeen has a pair av sharp eyes in his head, sor."

"I must not lose sight of him again."

"That's what I'm afther thinkin'."

"What is he doing now?"

"The same—talkin' wid the boss."

"Is he looking in this direction?"

"He is that."

"At us?"

"That same, sor."

"At you, or at me?"

"At both av us; first wan, and thin the other."

"What is his expression?"

"Sure, sor, it would make the divil grane wid envy."

"Tell me when he starts to come this way."

"He's doin' it now; and the boss is comin' wid him."

"As soon as they are near enough, I will move away. I will go outside the building, on the street; but I wish you to remain here."

"All right, sor."

"As far as it is possible, without appearing to do so, I wish you to hear all that he has to say. If he remains here very long, you can come outside before he does; but, if he goes at once, you can follow him out."

"I understand, sor."

"If, when you come out, you do not see me, or I do

not speak to you, go to the house, and wait there until I come. Will you do that?"

"I will. Hush, now, sor; sure, they're right here."

Chick moved a little bit away, keeping his back toward the man as he approached; and the assistant heard Survanieff say:

"It is hardly worth while for me to view the corpse at all, after what you have told me. It is merely a coincidence of names, I suppose—and yet the name is not a common one. Poor chap! It is rather strange, is it not, that a man could be murdered as this one was, and the assassin leave no clue behind him."

"Ah!" replied the superintendent of the burial company. "But I am told that there is one man after the murderer who never fails to run down his man."

"Indeed! Who is that?"

"Nick Carter."

Chick lingered another moment.

"I have heard of him, I think. A sort of second Vidocq, isn't he?"

"Vidocq couldn't hold a candle to him, sir."

"You don't tell me! He must be a remarkable man, indeed."

Chick, with his back still toward them, was conscious of the fact that Survanieff turned and regarded him earnestly for an instant; and that then he gave his entire attention to the corpse; and the assistant wheeled in his tracks long enough to shake his fist at the superintendent of the burial company, and then, with a scowl of anger on his face, he hurried from the building.

"Of all the stupid blunders!" he muttered, as he went.

Two doors below that building there was a freight elevator shaft, and a big fellow was standing in the entrance to it, smoking a pipe.

"Do you operate this elevator?" asked Chick.

"I do, sir."

"You can earn a dollar very easily if you will stand here in the doorway and watch the entrance to the burial company's offices. If you see anybody come out, tell me so, and tell me what he looks like, and which way he turns. I won't keep you five minutes."

"I'm on, sir."

Chick stepped back into the elevator, and at once began a rapid but thorough change in his appearance.

Fortunately, he had come prepared for that very thing, and he had all the necessaries with him.

First, he removed his coat and vest, and laid them aside. Then, with great rapidity, he pulled his suspenders from his shoulders and stepped out of his trousers.

In an instant he had turned them inside out, and gotten into them again, changing the articles in the pockets as he did so.

Then he donned the vest again—inside out; and the coat he served in the same manner, so that, although less than two minutes before he had been dressed in a suit of brown, he was now wearing one of Scotch gray, with a faint, and almost imperceptible, check running through the goods.

Next he tossed the hat he had been wearing into a corner, and from one of the pockets of his clothing brought forth a closely cropped wig of red hair, a short, bristling mustache of the same hue, and two little tufts of hair, likewise red, which he attached to the sides of his face in front of his ears.

In another pocket he found a Scotch cap of the golf pattern, and with a piece of grease-paint he touched up his eyebrows.

Then he shook himself, felt in his pockets, to see if everything was all right, and stepped from the elevator into the hall.

"Nobody has come out, eh?" he asked the man, who still had his back turned.

"Not a soul, sir," replied the man, turning about; and then he gasped for breath.

"Who the devil are *you?*" he demanded.

"I'm a detective," said Chick; "and it is up to you now to forget all about this. Here is your dollar, and there is a hat inside the elevator that you can have, and wear, if it will fit you. I haven't been quite five minutes, have I?"

"Just about that, sir; and you're the very devil, aren't you?"

"Not quite."

"It beats anything I ever saw. You don't happen to be Nick Carter, do you?"

"No; I do not," replied Chick, smiling.

"Well, sir, I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes!"

"You can help me still more, if you wish to do so," said Chick.

"I'll do it. Tell me how."

"Keep watch on that door a little longer. Tell me if anybody comes out. When somebody does come out, if I walk rapidly past that person, you wait where you are until I am a little ahead, and then run after me. When you catch up with me, shout out something about the boss—you understand? Say that the boss wants me to be sure and get back here by three o'clock."

"I'm on. I'll do it. And, say, here he comes now."

Chick stepped outside—but it was Finnigan who was approaching, glancing from right to left in his search for Chick; and Chick purposely stood outside the door until the Irishman had passed quite close to him; but he let him go without a word.

"That isn't the man I'm after," said Chick, returning to the hallway. "The next one will be the right one."

And now he had not long to wait.

Less than five minutes later, Survanieff came out of the door, hesitated for a moment on the step, while he

looked sharply up and down the street, and then he started rapidly away toward Broadway.

And Chick started out after him, walking so rapidly that he speedily overtook and passed him; and just a moment after he had done so he could hear the sound of hurrying feet behind him, and the voice of the elevator man shouted:

"Hey, there! Grey! Hey, there! Grey!"

"Well?" demanded Chick, when the man had almost caught up with him.

"The boss sent me after you to tell you that you're not to forget to call upon Street, Walker & Doolittle while you are out, and that you're to be back before three."

"All right," replied Chick, permitting the man he wished to shadow to pass him at that moment, while he dipped into his pockets for another dollar for the elevator man.

"You're all right," he said to him, in a low tone. "You did that well. When I want another bit of help of this kind, I'll come for you."

He left him then, and hurried after Survanieff, who had already gained considerably upon him.

Once, before they reached Broadway, the latter looked around, but he evidently felt certain that he was not followed, for he did not repeat the experiment, and Chick had no difficulty in boarding the same up-town car that he took.

Inside the car, Chick seated himself directly opposite his man, for he believed the boldest way to be the best, since he knew that he had succeeded in giving Survanieff the impression that he was an employee of one of the firms located near the burial company's offices.

He wondered how far north the man was going to ride—and then he did a lucky thing; he left his seat at Thirty-second Street and went out upon the rear platform, and he was delighted to see that Survanieff rose a moment later and followed him.

He saw his man put up his hand as a signal for the car to stop at Thirty-third Street, and so, when the car had almost reached that corner, Chick dropped off, and strolled away leisurely toward the Waldorf.

He carried a small mirror in his pocket, and now he produced it, and held it for a moment so that he could see behind him; and again he had the pleasure of discovering that Survanieff was coming along the same street.

Then he slowed down a little, to permit the man to pass him, which he did a moment later; and then, keeping about the same distance behind him, they entered the Waldorf.

But Survanieff had no sooner entered the hotel than he turned and went out again, pausing only long enough to purchase a paper at the news-stand; and Chick understood then, for the first time, that the man suspected that he was followed, and had shrewdly guessed who it was that was doing the shadowing.

"All right," thought Chick. "If that's your game, and you want to play it wide open, I'll accommodate you. I'll follow you now, wherever you go, no matter whether you know I'm doing it, or not. We will just see how that will work."

He wheeled, as he made this remark to himself, and boldly followed the man from the hotel to the street.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN AMAZING SORT OF VILLAIN.

Outside the hotel the man stepped to the edge of the pavement, and signaled to a cab; and then, as Chick paused, somewhat in doubt whether to openly call another, or to wait until Survanieff had started away, the latter turned and plainly beckoned to him.

"What in blazes does he mean by that, I wonder?" muttered Chick, pretending not to see the gesture; but it appeared that Survanieff was not to be put off by any such subterfuge, for, perceiving that Chick chose not to respond to the summons, he walked directly up to where the assistant was standing.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, in a cool, quiet tone, and with the suggestion of a sneer in his eyes, "but it has occurred to me that I can possibly save you a lot of trouble."

"Do you?" asked Chick. "How?"

"By offering you a seat beside me in the cab. I am about to drive to the Hotel Percheron, and it occurred to me that possibly you would like to ride with me. It will be much more comfortable than following in another cab."

"You seem to be pretty well satisfied that I am following you," said Chick, with a touch of anger in his voice.

"Certainly. Why not? You have made it sufficiently plain."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. I must compliment you, though, on the rapidity with which you changed your clothes."

"Huh!" Chick grunted, with disgust.

He had supposed that he did the act so well that there was not a possibility that he would be spotted, and here this man had known him from the very first.

"Will you get inside and ride with me?" asked Survanieff, again.

"Why, yes; I may as well do so, I suppose."

"To the Percheron," ordered Survanieff, as Chick stepped into the cab, and then he followed him.

"And now," he said, when they were seated side by side, "will you be so good as to inform me why you have done me the honor to dog my footsteps? I confess that I am curious on the point."

Chick realized that the moment had come when he

must play a close game, and he thought that there might yet be an opportunity to throw this remarkable man off his guard, so he laughed aloud, as if greatly amused, and replied:

"You're a cute one, you are. I didn't suppose you would get onto me like that. How did you do it?"

"You appear to be answering my question by asking another. However, I will answer you. I did it with my eyes. And now will you answer my question?"

"What was it? I've forgotten."

"Why are you following me?"

"To find out where you are going. Why do you suppose one man follows another?"

"How does it concern you to know where I am going?"

"Because I wish to know who you are."

"And why do you care to know who I am, if you please?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't care a rap who you are, or what you are, or where you are going, or what you do, or what you don't do, or anything about you. Now, maybe that will answer all your fool questions at once, mister."

"Softly, softly, my friend. When a man is shadowed on the street, and in the cars, he naturally is curious to know why it is done. If you don't care anything about any of those things you have mentioned, why did you follow me at all?"

"I've got to earn my salary, and I couldn't do that if I didn't obey orders."

"So you were told to follow me, were you?"

"Nope; not you, particularly. Anybody at all."

"Eh? Anybody at all? I don't think I understand."

"Anybody at all who manifested any interest in the stiff; see?"

"Oh! In the body at the burial company's rooms. Is that it?"

"It sounds like it. I think it is."

"So you have followed me merely because I manifested sufficient interest in the victim of last night's tragedy to view the body?"

"Correct. You can go up to the head of the class."

"You believed it possible that I might know something about the murder, did you?"

"*Somebody* knows about it."

"I suppose that is singularly true, my friend; but why I?"

"You, as well as another. You went there to see the corpse, didn't you? And you're the fif—well, you're not the only one who has been there."

"Indeed? Now, suppose that another gentleman should go there while you are away on this wild goose chase after me, eh? You would lose him, wouldn't you?"

"I would, maybe; but the boss wouldn't."

"You mean that there are others like you somewhere near there, prepared to pursue the next man who goes there to see the corpse?"

"That's the way it sounds, isn't it?"

"Is there, for example, somebody now on the track of that Irishman who was there with you when I entered the place?"

"I reckon my side partner isn't very far away from where he is right now."

"How long a time do you intend to keep on my track, may I ask?"

"Until I find out who you are, what your business is, how you spend your time, where you go, who your friends are, what you know about the murder, why you went there to see the body, what you——"

"Wait! wait! wait! For Heaven's sake, wait! I cannot follow you."

"Well, I can follow you, all right, even if you did drop to me. Say, I'd consider it a favor, mister, if you'd tell me how you did that."

"I have told you once—with my eyes."

"They must be regular gimlets, then, to see through this rig. I thought I was pretty well disguised, considering the time I took in doing it."

"So you are. But I suspected just what you would do when I saw you leave the room where we viewed the body."

"What! Do you mean to say that you knew then——"

"The gentleman in charge told me that you were one of Nick Carter's men."

"He ought to have a punch in the jaw!"

"So I thought at the time—strictly on your account, however. Now, what can I do to satisfy you, and to relieve you of the burden of following me?"

"Well, you might tell me the history of your life. That would help some."

"I am afraid it would take too long."

"Maybe you'd like to answer a few questions."

"You can ask them. I can tell better about answering them after I have heard them."

"What is your name?"

"Paul Survanieff," was the cool reply—and Chick was amazed.

Instantly he pretended to be vastly astonished, and he cried out:

"What!"

"Paul Survanieff."

"That's Russian, isn't it?"

"Yes; did you never hear the name before?"

"I've *seen* it."

"Have you, indeed? Where have you seen it?"

"I have seen it written in letters of gold, in the hand-guard of a jeweled dagger! That's where!"

It was Survanieff's turn to start, and he did so violently.

The Russian put out one hand and seized Chick's arm in a viselike grip, but instantly he relinquished his hold.

"Do you mean that it was a weapon such as you describe that killed Alexis de Plantois?" he asked quietly.

"Sure. Didn't you know it?"

"I did not. I had no idea of it, else I probably would not have told you my own name so readily."

Chick looked at the man through half-closed lids, studying him openly.

"I wonder if he is speaking the truth now?" he thought to himself. "Or is he lying? By Jove! if he is, he does it well." Aloud, he said:

"I begin to think that it is fortunate that I followed you, after all, Mr. Survanieff. It is quite evident to me that if you don't know anything about the murder, you do know a lot about people who are apt to know something about it. And it is as sure as greens that the jeweled dagger I have mentioned is no stranger to you."

"You are quite right," was the calm reply, and Chick was again amazed by the readiness of the man to admit all that he had done.

"Well," said Chick, "you asked me a little while ago how long a time I intended to keep on your trail. I think I can answer that question now."

"Very well; do so."

"I intend to keep on your trail until somebody is convicted of that murder."

"Does that mean that you suspect me of the crime?" asked Survanieff, with a smile.

"No; it does not, for I don't."

"That is a comforting assurance, at least."

"But I do suspect now that you've got a pretty clear idea of who did do it."

"You are wrong there. I am as much in the dark as you are. I did not even know that Alexis de Plantois was in the country."

"But you knew the man, didn't you?"

"Certainly. He was my cousin."

Again was Chick amazed by the calm admissions this man made to him; but he continued with his questions:

"What are you going to the hotel for now?"

"To find out all I can about the murder."

"Maybe I can tell you that better than they can."

"Possibly. I had not thought of that."

"But I won't. I'll tell you who will, though."

"Indeed? Who?"

"Nick Carter."

"Then I shall most certainly pay my respects to Nick Carter!"

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly."

"Gee, but you're easy! I thought I'd have to make a charge against you, and arrest you in order to take you there."

"Not at all, my friend. You can take me there just as soon as I have looked after the effects of my poor cousin, and have learned enough of the facts of the case to enable me to cable understandingly to his home in Paris."

"And you will go quietly and willingly with me to Nick Carter's house after that?"

"Certainly. If it is in my power to do anything which will assist you in the capture of the murderer of my cousin, you may be assured that I shall use my utmost efforts to do so."

They rode along in silence a little farther, and then Chick turned suddenly upon his companion.

"Look here," he said. "While you were there in the burial company's office, I heard you tell the super that you were mistaken; that the corpse was not the man you thought it was. Now, why did you do that, when you knew all the time who it was? Tell me that!"

"I did it simply because I knew that a detective was standing close beside me, and I did not think it wise to blurt out all I knew at that moment. That is all."

"But you did know that it was your cousin the moment you saw the body, didn't you?"

"I knew it before I saw the body, if that is any satisfaction to you," was the calm reply.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE ROOM OF THE TRAGEDY.

They arrived in front of the Hotel Percheron a moment later, and left the cab, whereupon Survanieff paid the driver, and dismissed him.

"I shall telephone, inside, for my motor-car to come here after us," he explained. "Will you stay close beside me, so that you won't lose me, or have you taken me at my word, that I will go with you to the house of Nick Carter?"

"I haven't quite made up my mind yet how to take you," replied Chick quite frankly. "You are a sort of fifteen puzzle to me."

"That is unfortunate, for I assure you I have endeavored to be as open as the day. Now, if you will step to the desk with me—I wish to serve formal notice on the management that the murdered man was my cousin, and that I wish his effects cared for until word is received from his people in Paris."

Chick followed him to the desk.

"At least," he thought, "I will find out his address now."

But he was doomed to disappointment, even in this, for when the manager asked him for his address he replied:

"If you will give me your registry book I will write my name in it. I think I will come here and stay for the present. I will send my baggage around some time this evening; and—er—you may give me the same room that my poor cousin occupied, if you will."

"But, my dear sir," exclaimed the clerk, aghast at such

a suggestion, "we are about to have that room entirely renovated, and——"

"It is entirely unnecessary, I assure you. The room will have no terrors for me as it is; rather, I should like to occupy it just as it is. I doubt if I will be here more than two or three weeks. After that you may do all the renovating you please."

While they stood there at the desk, Chick felt a slight touch against his arm, and, turning, he was enabled to recognize Nick Carter, who had approached silently behind them, but who was so thoroughly disguised that nobody but Chick could have recognized him, and not even he if he had not been familiar with the disguise.

But the detective made no remark.

He had approached Chick merely to let him know that he was there, and, now he turned away, and began to pace slowly up and down the office floor, with his hands behind his back, and with the air of one who carried the weight of the universe on his shoulders.

His disguise was that of a pompous banker, possibly from the West, who felt that he owned little old New York the moment he got there.

"And now for the telephone-booth, and then the auto," said Survanieff, turning around from the desk. "Do you care to follow me there, or will you wait here?"

"I think I will drop into a chair, and wait here," replied Chick. "Did you get your room—I mean your cousin's room?"

"Oh, yes. I'll be back in a moment."

He turned and hurried away toward the booths, and the instant he was gone the two detectives drew near together, although they were careful to pass round an angle of the wall, out of immediate view.

"Where did you pick him up?" asked the detective, speaking rapidly.

"At Merritt's."

"It is Survanieff, I suppose?"

"Yes; and the remarkable thing about him is that he admitted at once that he is Survanieff, that the dead man was his cousin, and that he has a pretty clear idea about the identity of the murderer. He's the slickest article I have met yet, Nick."

"I thought so the moment I saw him."

"He has promised to go around to the house with me to see you."

"That would be like him, I should think."

"He is telephoning for his car now to take us there."

"You won't find me at home, Chick. You will have to keep him there," said the detective, smiling.

"Possibly he won't want to wait."

"Then tie him."

"Eh?"

"Tie him; knock him on the head; shoot him——"

"What the devil to do you mean?"

"I mean that I haven't the least idea that you will get him there at all. I fact, I do not think he will return here after you when he has telephoned. He will give you the slip."

"Then why in——"

Chick was starting away, when Nick pulled him back again.

"Patsy is outside, and Ten-Ichi is back there near the telephone-booths, disguised as an American District messenger boy," he said. "I have given them both the tip. I saw you when you got down from the cab."

"One would suppose that you knew that I would pick him up at Merritt's," said Chick.

"No; but I did rather expect to pick him up here, after the receipt of that cable."

"By the way, I don't suppose the answer has arrived to that one about Olga, has it?"

"It had not when I left the house."

"When did you leave?"

"A few moments after you did."

"You should have seen that Irishman when he recognized Survanieff down at Merritt's."

"Well, sir, are you ready?" said a pleasant voice behind them, so that both started, and turned.

It was Survanieff, and he added, with a touch of banter in his tone:

"I see, my friend, that you have discovered an acquaintance. Is this gentleman, perhaps, in the same business as yourself? Is he another one of Nick Carter's aids?"

"No," replied Nick, with sudden resolution. "It happens that I am Nick Carter in person. My assistant has just informed me that you were going to my house to see me, so now, if you are ready, we will go together."

"But why go there at all, now that you are here, Mr. Carter?" asked Survanieff, smiling. "I think, from my conversation with your assistant, that I have already got the drift of what you wish to say to me—or, rather, to ask me. I have already engaged the same apartment in which my poor cousin was slain. I have no doubt that the management would let me have the key at once—that is, if you would care to talk with me there."

"As well there as anywhere," replied Nick, shrugging his shoulders. "Come."

The detective himself led the way to the desk, for he had already informed the manager of his identity, and a moment later they were ascending in the elevator on their way to the room of the tragedy.

"Shall I go with you?" Chick had asked, at the foot of the elevator-shaft; and Survanieff had replied:

"My dear fellow, I am not unmindful of the delight to be found in your company, but I really think that Mr. Carter and I can dispense with it at present. I shall be inclined to discuss this matter much more freely with Mr. Carter if we are alone together."

"He is quite right, Chick," said Nick. "I think it

would be well if you would return home, and wait there till I come."

As the detective made this remark, he lifted his hat from his head, smoothed his hair a trifle, and replaced it; and this was a signal to Chick that he was merely to change his disguise, and be prepared to shadow Survanieff again when the interview should be over.

The room they entered had been darkened; that is, the curtains were drawn, and preparations had been made for an entire renovation of the apartment; but Nick soon raised the shades, and then the two men seated themselves, facing each other, across the center table.

"Now, Mr. Carter," said Survanieff, "in what way can I be of service to you?"

Nick did not reply for a moment; but, when he did, he said:

"I am not quite sure how to reply to that question, sir, and I think it will be well to begin by being quite frank with you."

"That is true."

"And to tell you that I suspect you of complicity in this crime."

Survanieff raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders; and Nick added:

"I regard you as an accessory after the fact—if not before it."

"That is what one might call being brutally frank, isn't it?"

"Possibly; but it is up to you now to assure me that I am wrong."

"I shall certainly endeavor to do that. That is partly why I am here, for your assistant gave me very plainly to understand that I was so regarded. Though why I should be is more than I can imagine. My other reason for being here, you may not, under the circumstances, believe, but it is because I wish to bring the murderer of my cousin to justice."

"Were you friendly with your cousin, Survanieff?"

"Hardly that. We were never friends."

"Were you enemies?"

"No; not that, either. We simply ignored each other."

"Why?"

Survanieff shrugged his shoulders, and laughed in a subdued sort of way.

"My cousin never quite approved of me," he said, "and he was what I might call too good to be true. I really do not think that Alexis would have told a lie, or that he would have consented to any act which was not strictly in accordance with his principles, to save his life. On the other hand, I was never troubled with such scruples."

"You mean that you would do both, or even more, if you thought occasion required it?"

"Precisely."

"You have not an extremely savory reputation in Paris, Survanieff."

"No; I am quite aware of that. I see that you have informed yourself."

"I cabled to Paris for information concerning your cousin. In reply, I received a little concerning yourself with it."

"Yes? That is interesting."

"Let us suppose for the moment that you are as ignorant concerning this crime as I am."

"That is extremely kind of you; but go on."

"Who would you suspect of this murder?"

"Really, Carter, I think you are going ahead too fast now. We haven't quite got to that as yet, have we?"

"Your cousin was a stranger in this country. He had been here only a few days, in fact. I find among his papers evidence which tells me that he came here in search of another cousin, who had written to him for assistance—a young woman by the name of Olga. Am I to suppose that this other cousin, whose name is the same as your own—Survanieff—has been living here under your protection?"

"Since Olga Survanieff happens to be my sister, it would be a logical deduction," was the calm reply.

"Your half-sister, is she not?"

"I perceive that you are well informed."

"Where is Olga Survanieff at the present moment, sir?"

"I haven't the remotest idea, Mr. Carter."

"Is she not living with you?"

"She was—until yesterday. Immediately after we dined last evening she disappeared. I have not seen her since. If it were not for the fact that Alexis has been murdered, I would believe that she came here to this hotel to see him, for he must have found a way to communicate with her immediately upon his arrival in the country."

"But you think now——"

"I do not know what to think now. The murder puts me all at sea. Olga herself is incapable of a crime of any kind; and yet, were it not for the fact that Alexis is dead—murdered—I should feel positive that she went to him, and that her disappearance is due to his assistance."

"But you have another sister, who lives with you, also, have you not?" asked Nick sharply; and Survanieff started slightly, and looked keenly at the detective, as if the question were not only an unwelcome one, but was also an unpleasant surprise.

CHAPTER X.

THE FINDING OF OLGA SURVANIEFF.

The reply that Survanieff made to this last question asked by the detective was rather unlooked for, for he threw back his head, with a light laugh, and remarked:

"By Jove! Mr. Carter, you seem to be wonderfully well informed for a man who pretends not to have known of my existence until an hour ago."

"I have made no such pretense," replied Nick shortly.

"That is so; it was your assistant."

"You have not replied to my question."

"You desire a literal reply, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"I am the only child of my father's first wife; Olga is the only child of his second wife; and, therefore, I have no other sister."

"Then who is the other woman who resides with you?"

Survanieff threw another keen and searching glance at the detective; then he twisted the waxed ends of his mustache; and then he replied, in a careless tone, as if the matter possessed little interest for him:

"It is quite possible that you refer to my wife, Mr. Carter. But I would like to know, if you don't mind telling me, just how long you have been on my trail?"

"You may call it five weeks, if it pleases you," replied Nick.

"So long?"

"I think," said Nick slowly, "that it was five weeks ago yesterday since your half-sister dropped a letter on the street that was addressed to me."

It was only by reason of a momentary gleam that appeared in Survanieff's eyes that Nick knew the statement had touched him. He showed it in no other way; but he leaned back in his chair, drew a cigar from his pocket, and lighted it calmly, before he said:

"I remember the circumstance. There was an Irishman following us. It happened on Forty-ninth Street. I suspected that she had dropped something. I turned around, to see if it were true. The Irishman—by the way, was he one of your assistants, also? I saw him today at the offices of the burial company. But never mind that. The Irishman was tying his shoe; I suspect that he had his foot over the letter that Olga had dropped. Poor girl!"

"Why do you say 'poor girl'?"

"I won't answer that question. It refers to a family bereavement to which I do not like to refer. I am sorry if her letter has caused you any inconvenience, or has put you to unnecessary trouble, however. Your reference to it has informed me why I am suspected of complicity in this crime that happened in this room."

"You insinuate that Olga is not right in her mind."

"Do I?"

"You also say that she has disappeared, and that you do not know where she is now, yet you seem to feel very little concern about her."

"You are wrong there, Carter. My wife is moving heaven and earth to find her at this moment. If I should seek her, she would run away from me the moment I came in sight. She might even destroy herself. She hates me, unfortunately, although I have always been very good to her. But it is one of her delusions, and I have to bear it."

The detective regarded the man in silence for a moment. Then he said:

"You are a very clever man, Survanieff."

"Thank you."

"I think we will cease this fencing, and I will ask you a few direct questions."

"Yes; that would be better."

"There is a marked family resemblance between your sister Olga and the woman to whom you refer as your wife. Will you explain that to me?"

"Certainly. My wife is also my cousin. She is the sister of the man who was murdered in his room."

"Ah! Were they on friendly terms with each other?"

"I believe so—whenever they chanced to meet; but that was not often."

"Do you know about the weapon with which your cousin was killed?"

"Your assistant told me about it."

"Did he tell you of the name we discovered written in the guard among the meshes of gold wire?"

"He said the name of Survanieff was there; that is all. He did not tell me if there was another name."

"The writing was, 'Olga Survanieff, Moscow.'"

"Good God!" exclaimed Survanieff, rising abruptly from his chair, and then dropping back into it again.

"The fact seems to surprise you," said the detective.

Instead of replying, Survanieff got upon his feet again, and began to stride rapidly up and down the room. He thrust his hands deeply into his pockets, bowed his head forward, and wore the air of one who was face to face with a difficult problem, and who was trying to think it out as quickly as possible; and Nick left him to himself while he did so.

At last he turned and faced the detective.

"Mr. Carter," he said, "what you have told me is in

the nature of a shock. I find myself unable to explain it fully to you, for it suggests many things to me regarding which I am determined to be dumb. I will, however, say this:

"There are three daggers in existence made after that pattern, and each with the name of Survanieff in gold wire in the guard. Each also contains the word Moscow. In other respects they are different, for one of them contains Olga's name, another contains my own—Paul—and the third one is Sacha. Sacha is a nickname for Alexander, and was my father's name. Now, I was quite prepared to believe that the dagger you had found here contained my name, and I really supposed that to be your true reason for suspecting me. It is a terrible shock to find that Olga used her own—— Ah!"

He struck his forehead desperately with his hand, and then, with evidences of anger in his voice, he announced:

"This interview is at an end, sir. I decline to discuss it further."

What the detective intended to say in reply is not known, for at that instant there was a summons at the door, and upon opening it a folded note was handed into the room for Nick.

It was Survanieff who received it, and he passed it to the detective without comment, and Nick read:

"Important. Get rid of your man, or arrest him at once, if you can. Patsy and Ten-Ichi are ready to follow him. Finnigan is here. He has found Olga; at least, he knows where she is. CHICK."

The detective turned to Survanieff.

"Will you give me your present address?" he asked. "I find that I will have to leave you at once."

"What! Don't you intend to arrest me?" asked Survanieff, in evident surprise.

"No; at least, not yet."

"My address will be here after to-day."

"Where is your present address?"

"I must decline to give you that. You can put one of your men on my track, and follow me, if you care to do so; but, really, I think you had better leave me alone until to-morrow."

"And if you choose to throw my men off the track——"

"You seem to have a poor opinion of the abilities of your assistants."

"On the contrary. But I have an excellent opinion of yours."

Survanieff bowed, and Nick continued:

"If you should choose to leave the county, or to disappear—you know, it might even occur to you to kill yourself."

"Hardly that."

"What is your present address? Where is your wife staying at the present time? Where have you and your wife and Olga been living since you came to this country—or, rather, during the last week?"

"Mr. Carter, I might easily reply to your question by lying to you; and if I replied to it at all, I would lie to you; hence I will not answer it. I repeat, if you wish to know, you must have me followed."

He appeared to hesitate a moment, and then went on:

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Carter, I think I have been altogether too considerate of you. You began this conversation by unblushingly informing me that you suspected me—if not of the actual murder, then of complicity in the act. I declined to be offended. I still decline to take offense. That is all I have to say. If you are as great a detective as I have heard you are, you will have no difficulty in finding me when you want me. I don't think I shall run away, although I shall not promise not to do so; and now, sir, I regard this particular part of the incident as closed."

He stepped to the door, and opened it; and, as he did so, a second hall-boy appeared at the threshold.

"Is there a Mr. Paul Survanieff here?" he asked.

"I am he," replied Survanieff.

"A telegram for you, sir. It just came," stated the boy, and he thrust a yellow envelope into Survanieff's hands.

The man received it in very evident surprise; or, if he were not surprised, he acted the part so well that ninety-nine out of a hundred would have been deceived.

Tearing it open, and permitting the envelope to flutter to the floor, he read it at a glance; and then, with a curse, he crushed it in his hand, flung it from him, and, clapping his hat on his head, he rushed from the room.

The detective did not attempt to follow him—he knew that Chick would have made adequate arrangements to do that, and that if the chief assistant did not take up the chase himself, he would have provided a way so that Survanieff would not be lost sight of; besides, Patsy and Ten-Ichi were on hand, prepared for this very emergency.

He sat quietly in his chair, and watched Survanieff, as he almost ran along the hall toward the elevator; and when he had heard the iron door close, with a bang, and he knew that Survanieff had descended in it, he rose slowly, crossed the room, and picked up the crumpled message.

And here one of the greatest surprises of his life awaited him. He read aloud:

"Tell the detectives that I alone am guilty, that I tried to throw the blame on Olga, and that when you receive this I shall be beyond arrest. SOFIA."

It was the detective's turn to hasten from the room, and to call the elevator to that floor as expeditiously as possible; and, while he did so, he was continually asking himself what the message could mean.

"Sofia is, of course, the wife," he mused. "She is the one whom we have suspected from the first. Now, for some reason, she confesses to her husband that she did the murder—that she killed her own brother, and she intimates that she is about to destroy herself.

"Does it mean that, or is there some devilish plot beneath all this?

"It is plain to me that Survanieff knew about this murder, at least immediately after it was committed, if not before. It is also plain that he went to the offices of the burial company to-day with the direct object in view of placing himself, in a seemingly natural way, in communication with me. It is also plain——"

The elevator touched the bottom of the shaft, and the detective stepped from it, to find himself in the presence of Chick and the Irishman; and it was evident that Chick was thoroughly impatient.

"Come," he said. "If we would get there soon enough, we must hurry."

"Get where?" asked Nick.

"To the house where Finnigan has traced Olga. Come. I will explain later, Nick."

He led the way outside to a waiting automobile; they sprang inside, and the chauffeur, having evidently already received his instructions, started the car northward almost at full speed. They turned into Seventy-second Street, crossed Park Avenue, and presently drew up before one of the more modern residences, the door of which stood invitingly open.

Chick leaped to the ground, followed by the others. They dashed into the house, and up the stairs to the second floor. The door to the front room was closed and locked, but they threw themselves against it, and burst it open—and they all stopped stock-still just beyond the threshold.

The body of a beautiful young woman—unmistakably Olga Survanieff—was lying upon the couch. A small phial, bearing the label, "Prussic Acid," was on the floor beside her, and within reach of her hand; the odor of bitter almonds pervaded the room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERIOUS POISON OF TEHUANTEPEC.

To say that Nick Carter was amazed would be quite true.

Their trip from the hotel to the house where the body was found had been made so swiftly that conversation was impossible between the three men.

Nick, who still retained the telegram that had been delivered to Paul Survanieff, opened it, and read it again, before he advanced to the couch, for he knew instinctively that this young woman, who had so evidently taken her own life, was not the one who had signed, or who had sent, that message.

"'Tell the detectives that I alone am guilty, that I tried to throw the blame on Olga, and that when you receive this I shall be beyond arrest. Sofia,'" he read aloud; then he thrust the message into his pocket, and advanced to the side of Finnigan, who was standing beside the couch, and looking down upon the body that rested there, with great tears coursing down his cheeks.

"Finnigan!" he said sharply.

"Yis, sor."

"Is this girl the same one who dropped the letter on the street?"

"She is, sor."

"Who is Sofia?"

"Divil a bit av me knows; mebby 'tis the other wan."

The detective bent down over the body on the couch; then he got on his knees beside it; he put his hands on the girl's forehead, and discovered that it was still warm to the touch.

The eyelids were closed, and he raised one of them, dropping it again almost instantly. The mouth was closed, and he parted the lips with his fingers, and then, bending still farther down, he smelled of them. Then quickly he pressed one ear against her body, and listened; and then he started to his feet.

"I saw a doctor's sign three doors away," he said. "Get him instantly, Chick. This girl is not dead. She has not swallowed any of the contents of that bottle. She is alive."

Chick rushed away in hot haste, and in a very few moments returned with the doctor, who was a keen-faced, middle-aged man, who evidently knew his business.

Nick pointed toward the couch, and indicated the empty phial.

"The girl has been poisoned," he said; "but not with prussic acid. See what you can do for her."

"The room smells strong enough of the acid to suggest that she had swallowed a pint of it," said the doctor.

"It has been scattered on the floor."

"Eh? Why?"

"I don't know—yet."

The doctor bent over the body; he examined the eyes, as Nick had done; he smelled at the girl's lips; he listened at her heart; he examined the palms of her hands; and then he rose to his feet, and faced the detective.

"What do you know about this case?" he demanded, with some asperity.

"Very little—as yet, doctor."

"Do you know what poison this girl has taken?"

"I think I know what poison has been administered to her; I don't think she has taken any poison of her own accord; at least, that is my present opinion."

"Who are you, sir?"

"I am Nick Carter, a detective."

"Oh! May I ask how you know about this poison? It is very rare."

"I have seen the effects of it before. I know the odor of it. I smelled of her lips, as you did, and detected it. I knew then that the prussic acid had been scattered about the room for the purpose of destroying the other odor."

"Do you know the name of the poison she has taken?"

"Yes. *Vida dispues.* It means 'life afterward.' I do not know from what it is distilled. It is a poison of Tehuantepec."

"You say you have seen the effects of it before?"

"Yes. In Tehuantepec. There is a religious sect there that uses it. They believe that they visit heaven while they are under the influence of it. They will neither sell it nor give it away. The person who swallows it passes from the condition that girl is now in to the outwardly rigid appearance of actual death. The effect and the condition continues from five to seven days, according to the quantity absorbed. In Tehuantepec, the person who takes the poison is buried in the ground, in a strong box, with a hollow tube leading into it from above the surface of the ground. At the end of the five or seven days, the grave is opened, and the dead comes to life, none the worse for the experience—and very hungry. But I suppose you were aware of all this before, doctor?"

"I knew about it—yes; but I have never seen it. May I take the patient to my home, and care for her?"

"Yes. That is what I wish you to do—with the understanding that there are to be no experiments—no efforts to bring her out of her present condition until she wakes naturally."

"Certainly. I merely wish to watch her. It is most interesting. May I ask, Mr. Carter, why this has been done?"

"I think, doctor, that the persons who administered the poison expected her to be pronounced dead; I think they believed we would bury her; probably somebody would have claimed the body. Later, she would have been taken from the grave, while all the world would believe her to be dead. Do you know the people who have been living in this house?"

"Not at all."

"Or anything about them?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Have you seen this girl before?"

"Never."

"Chick, assist the doctor to carry her to his house. I rely upon you, doctor, to take the best of care of her. The expense will be mine."

He watched them out of the house with their burden, and then turned to Finnigan.

"Tell me how you knew about this business," he said.

"I didn't know about it at all, at all. Whin I came out av that burial place, I couldn't find me fri'nd onywhere. He disappeared. I started for your house, but whin I got to the corner I came face to face wid the woman; not this girl, but the other wan.

"She didn't so much as look at me, sor; she didn't see me. She was lookin' for the man, I think. He didn't come, and after a little she started away, and I follied.

"Sure, sor, she was aisy. I came up in the car wid her. She came to this house, and wint inside. I wint over to the other side av the strate, and sat down on a door-step, and watched. Afther awhile I saw that somethin' was doin' inside the house. Thin I saw the slip av a girrul run to the windy. I knew her at once. She tried to open the windy, but that other woman grabbed her from behind and drew her back. The little wan screamed; I could only just hear it, and I ran across the street, and rang the door-bell.

"Sure, I kept on ringin', but nobody answered. Then I saw a cop, and towld him about it. He only laughed at me. I towld him what I thought av him, and thin I started f'r your house.

"They towld me there that you were at the Hotel Percheron. I wint there. The mon ye call Chick saw me. I wouldn't have known him, but he towld me who he was, and I towld him what I knew about it.

"That's the whole story, sor, in a nutshell."

"You did well," said Nick. "Wait here for me."

The detective went rapidly through the house, from top to bottom, and he quickly discovered that every article that might have belonged to the people who had occupied it had been removed, and that they seemed to have forgotten or neglected nothing in their departure. It was quite evident that this moment had been foreseen.

"Come," he said, returning to the Irishman after completing his search. "There is nothing that we can do here. They rented a furnished house, and they have deserted it; that is all."

"Are ye sure, sor, that the slip av a girrul will live?" asked Finnigan.

"Yes. Come."

Chick was awaiting them on the doctor's door-step; and he assured his chief that he was satisfied that Olga had been left in the best of hands.

"What is the program now?" he asked, then.

"Home. We must wait there for Patsy and Ten-Ichi. The whole thing was a plan to enable Paul Survanieff to give us the slip;" and then, after a moment of silence, he added: "But, all the same, I'm blessed if I can explain that telegram. It is a complication in the case that doesn't seem to fit in with the rest of it—unless——"

"Unless what, Nick?"

The detective hesitated before he replied, and then he did so slowly and carefully.

"Unless Paul Survanieff was himself somehow responsible for that message. I think it is the only explanation. I think now that we will find that Sofia *is* dead, but that she did not kill herself. Paul Survanieff is a master villain, Chick."

He said no more, and the automobile, going rapidly, soon brought the party to the detective's door—and there Ten-Ichi ran out to meet them.

"We lost him, chief," he said rapidly. "He got away from us; but we found the other woman. She is dead. She had evidently stabbed herself through the heart, and she used a dagger exactly like the one that killed Captain de Plantois, save that the name in the guard is different—that is, the first name."

"What is it this time?"

"Sacha."

"Where is the body?"

"At the Percheron."

"What!"

"Yes. On the floor above the one where the other murder was committed. She engaged the room this morning, under the name of Madame Parish. Then she went out. Nobody seems to know when she returned."

"She probably wint there afther she poisoned the girrul, and whin I left her front dure to look f'r you, sor," ventured Finnigan; and Nick nodded.

"She left a written confession," continued Ten-Ichi. "In it she says that De Plantois was her brother, and that she killed him in order to inherit his property; that she took the girl Olga to the hotel with her when she went there to do the deed, and that she used Olga's dagger; that she concealed herself in the room when he was absent, and waited; that the card found on the desk was one that Olga wrote to her before they left Paris, and at a time when they had quarreled, and she closes by saying that the remorse she has felt because of the deliberate murder of her own brother was driving her mad, and that the only course for her to pursue was to kill herself."

"Doesn't she mention Paul Survanieff at all?" asked the detective quietly.

"Yes; she exonerates him. She says that he knew nothing of her intention, although she believes that he now suspects her of the crime."

"Humph!" said Nick. "How does she sign herself?"

"Sofia Survanieff."

"Is that all, Ten-Ichi?"

"Yes."

"How did you lose track of the man?"

"We didn't lose track of him. We didn't see him. He did not come down in the elevator at all. He must have gone up in a balloon. He eluded us entirely."

"And how did you find the body of the woman?"

"A chambermaid discovered it, and gave the alarm. The written confession told us who she was."

Nick was grimly silent for a moment, and then he said:

"That woman did not send that telegram. She did not kill herself. She had her instructions from her husband, and she carried them out to the letter. They consisted in her giving the poison to Olga, and then going straight to that hotel, where she was to meet him. Neither did she murder her brother."

"Then who did?" asked Chick.

"Paul Survanieff. He committed both crimes, he had the telegram sent to himself, and you will find that he also wrote that confession found with his dead wife."

CHAPTER XII.

THREATENED BY A TERRIBLE FATE.

Considering the story told by Ten-Ichi, the surprise which Nick Carter and his companions experienced when the automobile drew up in front of the hotel, and they saw the tall figure of Paul Survanieff standing just within the entrance, apparently awaiting them.

Nick was the first to leap from the motor-car, and he hastened at once into the hotel; but only to find that even in that short interval the man had utterly disappeared; but one of the hall-boys was near at hand, and Nick seized upon him.

"Where did that gentleman go who stood here just now?" he asked quickly.

"Mr. Survanieff?"

"Yes. Where did he go?"

"To the elevator, sir. He just went up."

Nick signed to his companions to follow him, and in another moment they were deposited on the floor where the latest tragedy had occurred; but, although they hastened to the room where the dead woman was, Paul Survanieff was not there.

The detective paused only long enough to assure himself of that fact, and then, again indicating that his friends were to follow him, he hurried to the stairs, and ran down them to the next floor beneath.

It was on this floor that the room formerly occupied by Alexis de Plantois was located, and where Nick had so lately held his remarkable interview with Survanieff, and the detective almost ran to the door.

He did not stop to rap upon it, but threw it open without ceremony, and entered, closely followed by Chick, Ten-Ichi, and Mike Finnigan.

Survanieff was there; they discovered that much the instant they opened the door.

He had drawn the center table toward him, and in that way had retreated to one corner of the room, where he now stood behind it; but that was not all.

Upon the table, directly in front of him, was a small square box, which looked as if it might be a jewel-casket, for it was bound with alternate gold and silver bands and was inlaid with mother-of-pearl; nor was that all.

They could all see that a single strand of white string had been passed through the side of the box that was next to Survanieff, and that he had tied the end of that string around his left wrist; and, save that the man stood there in an apparently careless attitude, smiling at them, that was all.

Nevertheless, it was sufficiently menacing.

There was not one among them—save, possibly, the Irishman—who did not instantly understand the situation.

The box was an infernal machine—a hidden bomb—and the string looped around Survanieff's wrist was connected with the mechanism in such a way that he had only to pull it to blow them all into eternity, and possibly to wreck the hotel, as well.

Survanieff's smile broadened when the four men came to a halt in front of him, and at a distance of five or six yards. He had uttered no word until then, but he saw that they understood.

"You do well to hesitate, Nick Carter," he said coldly, but still with that smile on his face. "You see, do you not, that the string is tied to my wrist, so that, even if you should shoot me where I stand, you would not escape? My fall would release the spring, and—well, I am a Russian, and I manufactured this little machine myself, more than a year ago. If any one of you should

dare to move a step nearer to me than you are now, I will pull the string, and we will all go to hell together! How do you like the prospect?"

"Not particularly well," replied the detective calmly. "What is your game?"

"To make terms with you."

"What are they?"

"Since I killed the woman up-stairs, who was my wife—oh, yes, I killed her; I have no hesitation in admitting it now—I have made up my mind that I have bungled this thing all the way through."

"I think you have," said Nick.

"Oh, I know it now, when it is too late. I should have kept away from that burial company place. You would have had a hard time to find me had I done that. But I was overbold. I thought I could fool you; and I had planned it all so nicely, too."

"You see, I came to the conclusion long ago that you had that letter from Olga. I knew that you were on my track——"

"Which I was not," said Nick. "Not until this morning."

"No? Then I *am* a fool. However, I supposed you were, and it amounted to the same thing. I feared you, I suppose, although I think you are the only man I ever did fear."

He raised his disengaged hand, and toyed with the ends of his mustache for a moment, and then he continued:

"I was getting short of money. I wished Olga to marry an old fossil here in this city, who is very rich. She was to marry him, and I was to poison him afterward, and we were to enjoy his money; but she bolted."

"I supposed you were a smuggler of diamonds," said Nick.

"Not lately. I was at one time. It had ceased to pay enough to suit me. I wanted bigger and better game. Also, I was tired of Sofia. And then, on top of it all, Alexis de Plantois arrived in the city, and found us out.

"You see, Olga had written to him, and he came. Then Olga partly won Sofia over to her side, and yesterday they came here to this hotel together to see him." He chuckled.

"I came, also," he continued. "I waited in the hallway until I saw him go out. Then I entered his room, and waited behind the door. When he came into the room I stabbed him, after which I carried him into the next room, and seated him at the desk where you found him. I put Olga's written card there in front of him, and I myself wrote the beginning of the letter you discovered on the desk.

"I had just completed my work when there was a tap at the door, and, feeling assured that it was Sofia, and Olga, I opened it. It was, however, Sofia—alone.

"I seized her and drew her inside. I pretended that Alexis had not come in yet. I made her climb over the davenport and lie down on the floor for a moment, knowing that her small boot would leave its imprint on the velvet, and that the odor of the perfume she uses would linger in the carpet. After a moment I told her to get up; that we would not wait for Alexis; that he could go hang, for all of me.

"We left the room and the hotel together, and she had no idea that her brother was dead. Outside, through the window, we beckoned to Olga—and she was frightened to see me there. She came at once. Neither of them knew until this morning that Alexis had been murdered.

"I made all that effort to cast suspicion upon Olga in order to frighten her into obedience. I believed that I could keep her from your clutches, and that I could hold the terror of arrest over her always—and I told them both that I would kill them if they did not obey me in the future.

"And then I blundered. I determined to shift the responsibility of the crime from Olga to Sofia; in other words, to involve them both, and when I went to the telephone-booth before you and I came to this room together, I arranged for that telegram that was brought to me here.

"I had ordered Sofia to take that room above us, under the name of Madame Parish; I had prepared the written confession. I am a clever forger, among other accomplishments. When I left you so hastily and ran to the elevator, I descended only one floor, and then ascended two floors in another one.

"You know the rest. I stabbed her with her own dagger, and placed her fingers around the hilt of it, to indicate that she had done the deed herself.

"I had determined then to brazen it out—to appear to assist you in the working out of the crime—to fool you to the end; but I dug up this little box, and placed it here ready for use in case of emergency.

"I want to tell you now that until you rode up to the

front door of the hotel with your companions, a few minutes ago. I had not changed my mind; but in that instant something told me that you would see through the whole thing, and that I would be arrested the moment you entered the hotel. I suppose I got stage-fright, or something, and imagined it."

"No; you were quite right," said Nick.

"Well, I came here and waited for you. Now, you know it all—save the terms I have to offer."

"No," said the detective. "There is one thing that I do not know. Tell me your object in administering the poison to Olga; or, rather, why your wife did it?"

"Poison—to Olga? I—I don't understand."

"We found her at the house in Seventy-second Street—dead," said Nick, making use of the last word for purposes of his own; and Survanieff started back so violently that he nearly pulled the string of the infernal machine. Then he smiled again.

"No, no," he said. "Not dead. I know now. I should have known at once. Sofia must have given her the *vida dispues*. It was some that I was saving to use in escaping execution for murder, if I should ever be in imminent danger of arrest. Sofia knew about it. I have no doubt that she persuaded Olga to swallow it in order that she might escape the charge of murder that would be made against her, promising to see to her burial herself, and to resurrect her in time. You do not understand. I will——"

"Yes, I do. I know all about it. I have seen it used in Tehuantepec."

"Have you? Then, even if I had made use of that, you would still have had me."

"Sure thing," said Nick, smiling at him across the deadly box.

"But now," said Survanieff, "you will agree to the terms I have to offer, for if you do not, I swear that I will pull this spring, and——"

He was interrupted by the sharp report of a pistol.

Nick Carter had thrown forward his right hand, and a revolver appeared in it as if by magic. It was discharged at the same instant, and the bullet, true to its aim, severed the string close to Survanieff's wrist.

And the next instant—before he could recover from his surprise, Nick Carter had seized him on one side, Chick on the other, Ten-Ichi had him around the legs, and Mike Finnigan stood, tall and straight, in front of him, with a revolver aimed at his heart.

"Faith, Misther Caarter, I can shoot the likes av him now without fear 'r favor, if ye do but spake the worrd!"

Just a word more.

Olga Survanieff awoke from her long sleep five days later, as well as ever, and with very little knowledge of the tragedies with which she had been surrounded, save what was told to her later on, and so ended the tragedy of an unfinished letter.

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will relate the further and thrilling history of the Princess Olga, who, it appears, had not yet escaped the machinations of her former associates. It will be No. 492, and will be entitled, "That Mysterious Affair; or, Chick's Wonderful Twelve Hours' Work."

About the rare Early Numbers of

Tip Top Weekly

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print.

We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays."

We give herewith a complete list of all the stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored cover catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

The Price of The Merriwell Books is Ten Cents per Copy. At all Newsdealers

Frank Merriwell at Yale.	Medal	No. 265.	10c.
Frank Merriwell Down South.	Medal	No. 189.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in Camp.	Medal	No. 266.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in England.	Medal	No. 210.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in Europe.	Medal	No. 201.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in Maine.	Medal	No. 276.	10c.
Frank Merriwell on the Road.	Medal	No. 208.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Athletes.	Medal	No. 261.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.	Medal	No. 247.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Book of Physical Development. Diamond Hand-Book		No. 6.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Bravery.	Medal	No. 193.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Champions.	Medal	No. 240.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Chase.	Medal	No. 271.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Chums.	Medal	No. 197.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's College Chums.	Medal	No. 212.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Courage.	Medal	No. 223.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Cruise.	Medal	No. 257.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Danger.	Medal	No. 241.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Daring.	Medal	No. 228.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Fame.	Medal	No. 302.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's First Job.	Medal	No. 274.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Foes.	Medal	No. 175.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Fortune.	Medal	No. 320.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.	Medal	No. 216.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Hard Luck.	Medal	No. 202.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.	Medal	No. 242.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.	Medal	No. 254.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.	Medal	No. 324.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.	Medal	No. 253.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Own Company.	Medal	No. 204.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Problem.	Medal	No. 250.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.	Medal	No. 225.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Protege.	Medal	No. 206.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Races.	Medal	No. 245.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.	Medal	No. 244.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's School-Days.	Medal	No. 150.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Secret.	Medal	No. 247.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Skill.	Medal	No. 287.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.	Medal	No. 200.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.	Medal	No. 292.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Struggle.	Medal	No. 230.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Trip West.	Medal	No. 185.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Vacation.	Medal	No. 232.	10c.

THE ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY MONDAY. **HANDSOME COLORED COVER**

Ted Strong wants to make your acquaintance, boys, and we are convinced that you will be proud to have him as a friend. The tales of his adventures among the cowboys are full of fascinating interest. He is known to every one as "King of the Wild West" and he upholds the title.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

90—King of the Wild West's Militia; or, Breaking the Strike in Leadville.
91—King of the Wild West's Justice; or, The Sheep War of the Las Animas.
92—King of the Wild West's Saint; or, The End of Polygamy in Utah.
93—King of the Wild West's Hold; or, Capturing the Big Timber Thieves.
94—King of the Wild West's Submarine; or, The Search for Sunken Treasure.
95—King of the Wild West's Finish; or, The Great Stone Door.
96—King of the Wild West's Peril; or, The Cannibals of Tiburon Island.
97—King of the Wild West's Strange Quest; or, The White Princess of Sonora.
98—King of the Wild West's Horsethief; or, The Enigma of Lost Springs.
99—King of the Wild West's Chase; or, The Rescue of Yuen Ho.
100—King of the Wild West's Meteor; or, The Race for the Klondike Diamond.
101—King of the Wild West in Siberia; or, Castaway on the Arctic Ocean.
102—King of the Wild West's Haunt; or, Stella's Escape from Sacrifice.
103—King of the Wild West's Dive; or, The Finding of the "Golden Baby."
104—King of the Wild West's Guard; or, Stella's Long Shot.
105—King of the Wild West's Posse; or, Stella's Own Vigilance Committee.
106—King of the Wild West Underground; or, Stella to the Rescue.
107—King of the Wild West's Brand; or, How Stella Held the Fort.
108—King of the Wild West's Campaign; or, How Stella Won the Victory.
109—King of the Wild West's Booty; or, Stella Finds the Pirate Loot.
110—King of the Wild West's Success; or, Stella and the Marked Bill.
111—King of the Wild West's Daring; or, Stella's Great Lariat Throw.

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS

of our libraries and cannot procure them from newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Cut out and fill in the following order blank and send it to us with the price of the books you want and we will send them to you by return mail. **POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.**

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. 190

Gentlemen:—Inclosed find.....cents for which please send me:

.....copies of **Tip Top**	Nos.....	.....	.....
..... " " **Nick Carter**	Nos.....	.....	.....
..... " " **Diamond Dick**	Nos.....	.....	.....
..... " " **Buffalo Bill**	Nos.....	.....	.....
..... " " **Brave and Bold**	Nos.....	.....	.....
..... " " **Rough Rider**	Nos.....	.....	.....

Name.....Street and No.....Town.....State.....

$15,000.00 REWARD

Payable to anyone who can show that the new Five-Cent Library,

MIGHT AND MAIN LIBRARY
STORIES OF BOYS WHO SUCCEED

is not now longer by thousands of words than any other Five-Cent Library. Here's your chance, boys.

The biggest five cents' worth published in America, and the best, too. Stories of boys who succeed in life. A different story every week. Get your photo published. MIGHT AND MAIN prints pictures every week of successful boys.

For Sale by all Newsdealers or will be sent on receipt of price by the Publishers.

THE WINNER LIBRARY COMPANY.

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. HANDSOMEST COLORED COVERS

No other detective library contains stories that are half so interesting. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest number from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

470—The Automobile Fiend; or, Nick Carter's Motor-Car Case.
471—Bellini, the Black Hand; or, Nick Carter Among the Terrorists.
472—The Black Hand's Nemesis; or, One Against a Hundred and One.
473—An Expert in Craft; or, Nick Carter and the Jewel Thieves.
474—Nick Carter's Terrible Experience; or, The Crime of the Limited Sleeper.
475—The Mystery of an Untold Crime; or, Nick Carter's Marvelous Skill.
476—Diana, the Arch-Demon; or, Nick Carter's Run of Luck.
477—Captain Satan, the Unknown; or, Nick Carter's Great Mistake.
478—A Wizard of the Highway; or, Nick Carter's Test of Faith.
479—Abducted in Broad Day; or, Nick Carter's Duplicate Prisoner.
480—The Tong of the Tailless Dragon; or, Nick Carter's Close Shave.
481—The Padlocked Mystery; or, Nick Carter and the Death Plot Trap.
482—Dema, the Dangerous; or, Nick Carter's Chase to Paris.
483—Nick Carter's Murder Problem; or, A Hide-and-Seek Game with the Dead.
484—A Battle Among the Clouds; or, Nick Carter's Criminal Client.
485—The Veiled Princess; or, Nick Carter's Secret Accomplishment.
486—The Conquest of a Kingdom; or, Nick Carter's Fight for a Throne.
487—The House of Skeletons; or, Nick Carter's Greatest Find.
488—A Queen of Inferno; or, Nick Carter's Giant Foes.
489—Nick Carter's Foxy Adversary; or, The Lures of the Bird of Paradise.

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS

of our libraries and cannot procure them from newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Cut out and fill in the following order blank and send it to us with the price of the books you want and we will send them to you by return mail. **POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.**

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. 190

Gentlemen:—Enclosed find.....cents for which please send me

.....copies of **Tip Top** Nos.....

..... " " **Nick Carter** Nos.....

..... " " **Diamond Dick** Nos.....

..... " " **Buffalo Bill** Nos.....

..... " " **Brave and Bold** Nos.....

..... " " **Rough Rider** Nos.....

Name.....Street and No.....Town.....State.....

The Greatest Baseball Story

ever written, by the most popular writer of stories of athletics in the world, **Burt L. Standish,** will appear as a serial, commencing in the July number of

The Popular Magazine

for sale at all news stands for ten cents per copy on June 10. The announcement of a new, long story by Mr. Standish will interest practically every young man in the United States. Every one who has ever read the Frank Merriwell stories, every one who is interested in the least in the great national game of baseball, every one who likes a story of action and incident in which every character is real and true to life, is sure to read this story, which is entitled

"THE ROCKSPUR NINE."

It is the story of a baseball nine, but above all, it is the story of a real, human character—a young man with plenty of good points but with plenty of failings also. In reading the history of his temptations, of his struggles and final victory, you feel toward him as toward a comrade and friend. You know, without being told, that Burt L. Standish can describe a game of baseball as can no other author. You know that he is absolutely unequaled in his ability to interest and hold his readers. This announcement will serve as a friendly hint to you to secure the copy of *The Popular* containing the first instalment in advance. Tens of thousands are awaiting another long story by Mr. Standish, and the edition is sure to be sold out within a short time after its appearance on the news stands.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE is the only magazine for young men. It is the only magazine which contains NOTHING but STORIES OF ADVENTURE. It is the largest fiction magazine issued. There are no "articles" in it, no poems, no love stories, nothing but stories of incident and dashing adventure. It costs 10c. at any news stand.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

THE FAVORITE LIST
OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest sleuth that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful, power of fascination.

MIGHT AND MAIN

These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title.

BRAVE AND BOLD

Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

THE TIP TOP WEEKLY

Boys, Frank Merriwell has opened a school of physical development. He has gathered all of his old-time comrades about him and their adventures are wonderfully interesting. These are certainly the best tales of athletic adventure.